

**EXPLORING THE PERSPECTIVES ON SCHOOLING HELD BY
TEACHERS' KIDS WHO CHOSE NOT TO GO TO COLLEGE**

A Dissertation

by

SHARON MARIE GANSLEN

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2007

Major Subject: Educational Human Resource Development

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ABSTRACT

Exploring the Perspectives on Schooling Held by Teachers' Kids

Who Chose Not to Go to College. (May 2007)

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The purpose of this study is to understand why some children of teachers, who, having been brought up in an environment where education is highly valued, nevertheless, choose not to pursue a college education right out of high school. The study focuses on young adults who have at least one parent who is a teacher and who, when they graduated from high school, either chose not to attend college right away or enrolled in college then left within the first few semesters.

Through open-ended interview questions, constant comparative qualitative analysis, and narrative analysis, the study examines what impact having a teacher as a parent has had on young adults' construction of formal education and their decision to forego higher education immediately after high school. The interviewer also asks the teacher-parents what response they had to that decision.

The research questions of this study are as follows: (1) What experiences of education do these young adults, who are teachers' kids, have? (2) How has

their family shaped their understanding of education and their attitudes toward it? (3) How did they choose not to pursue a college degree right out of high school and what meaning do they give to this decision? and (4) What is/was the teacher-parent's response to this decision?

This study illuminates the college decision-making process that young adults go through when they are in an environment in which education is a prominent feature. Two major findings emerge. For the young adults, all valued education but they had no sense of urgency about pursuing formal education immediately. Their decisions were shaped by particular life circumstances and, for many, a belief that a college education was irrelevant at that point in their lives. The second finding concerns the teacher-parents. These educators assumed that their children would go on to college, but they did not pressure them to do so; their primary concern was that their children be happy.

DEDICATION

THIS DISSERTATION IS DEDICATED TO
MILITARY FAMILIES:
PAST, PRESENT, AND TO COME

I AM SINCERELY APPRECIATIVE
OF THE INSIGHTS MY
PARTICIPANTS SHARED
DURING THIS STUDY OF PERCEPTIONS
ABOUT SCHOOLING AND COLLEGE.

I AM MORE DEEPLY APPRECIATIVE
OF THEIR DEDICATED
SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY.
THEIR SUPPORT OF
THOSE WHO SERVE
SHOULD NOT BE FORGOTTEN.

AS I WAS FINISHING THE FINAL
WRITTEN REPORT OF THIS STUDY,
ONE OF MY PARTICIPANTS
PRAYED FOR HER SON AND HUSBAND,
BOTH SERVING IN IRAQ.

PLEASE REMEMBER WHAT SHE,
AND SO MANY LIKE HER,
HAVE SACRIFICED.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Lessons Learned

Early in the fall semester in 1993, an assignment was given to a group of college freshmen. They were to write an essay, a personal narrative, detailing an experience that had somehow changed them and helped them to grow. The following is one of those essays:

As a freshman in high school, my year had started off as well as can be expected. I had joined our high school drill team, and I was involved in the French club, choir, and Young Life. I knew I would be very busy with my classes and all the activities I was supposed to attend. I also knew there would be added stress because my brother was a senior at the same school. I had prepared myself for school with the help of my family and counselors, but no one could have prepared me for what was to come. I never imagined the chaos, stress, and heartache that I would soon endure.

On December 20, 1989, my mother was diagnosed with acute

This dissertation follows the style of *College Composition and Communication*.

myelogenous leukemia (AML). AML is defined as "a life threatening change in cells that produce granulocytes, one of the types of white blood cells made in the bone marrow." (AMA, 433) the result of this change in cells is the rapid growth in the number of abnormal white blood cells. As their numbers increase, the leukemic cells invade the bone marrow and disrupt the production of normal granulocytes, red blood cells, and platelets. The common symptoms of acute myelogenous leukemia are fatigue, infections, fever, lip and mouth ulcers, and a tendency to bruise and bleed. (AMA, 433)

My mother was hospitalized in mid-December for fatigue, fever, and abnormal bruising. She was diagnosed with AML and moved to Scott and White Hospital. She began her first round of chemotherapy on the 23rd of December. The hardest thing for me during this time was keeping a positive attitude. Christmas is supposed to be a cheerful, giving time. But to me, my world was being torn apart, and the most important person in my life was being taken away. But I was also determined to be strong. My family needed me. I made Christmas the best I could by wrapping presents, making cookies, and decorating my mother's hospital room with ornaments, garland, and Christmas cards from friends and family. Despite her condition, my mom was very happy with what I had done, and that was all that really mattered.

After Christmas and the initial shock of my mom's diagnosis, everything became fairly routine. I'd go to school at 7:30 for drill team practice and go to classes until lunch. During lunch, I'd call my dad to see what I needed to fix for dinner. After I talked to my dad, I would call my mom to see if there was anything she needed. When I got home from school, I would clean the house, start dinner, and do my homework. We tried to visit my mother every day, but with my father working all the time and my brother and I both in school, there were days when we just couldn't make it.

My birthday in February had to be the best day I'd had since my mom had been hospitalized. The doctors confirmed my mother's remission a few days before my birthday, and she was released from the hospital the day of my birthday. I felt like I was the mother and she was the baby coming home for the first time.

Unfortunately, things didn't stay so great. On March 14, 1990, my mother was checked into M.D. Anderson in Houston for a bone marrow transplant. My Aunt Peggy had proved to be a suitable donor, which was a blessing, but there were still risks. In order to undergo the transplant, my mother had to be exposed to large amounts of radiation and chemotherapy to destroy the leukemic cells. This sounds easy, but by doing so, they also destroyed my mother's immune system. She had to be put in a sterile environment, a "bubble," and my family and I weren't

allowed to touch her. Up until this point, I had sat by my mother's side holding her hand. And now all I could do was put my hand on a glass window. I've never felt so helpless in my life. There was a possibility that I would never see my mom again, and I couldn't even kiss her goodbye. I tried to be strong, but I felt so isolated and distant. I wanted to crawl up into her lap and have her hold me, but I couldn't even touch her. I had to leave her side for the first time that day. The pain was too unbearable.

On the 23rd of March, my mother had her transplant and things were looking good. The doctors at M.D. Anderson were watching her progress very closely. Two days later, my mom unexpectedly went into a deep psychosis, causing her to lose all sense of reality. She removed the intravenous line in her chest and walked clear out of her safe, sterile environment into the dangerous world of germs. This was the first time I had ever had to accept the fact that my mom wasn't immortal. With no immune system, there was a 99% chance that she wouldn't make it through the night. When I went to see her that evening, I had prepared myself as best I could. I had decided that this was my chance to tell her how much I loved her. This is my chance to say goodbye. The only problem was that my mom didn't know who I was. I was very angry, hurt, and upset. I had taken care of her. I had done everything she should have done at home. I was a freshman in high school, and I was running a

household. How could she not know me after all she had put me through? I felt betrayed.

After the psychosis had diminished and my mother's immune system had gotten stronger, she was released from the hospital in Houston. It was a happy day for our whole family. We gave my mom a surprise "welcome home" party and invited everyone we could think of. My mother was very drained from her stay in the hospital, but the sparkle in her eye let us know how happy she truly was to be home. But, like the rest of this living nightmare, the happiness was short lived. On May 4th, while I was sitting in drill team class, I got a phone call. My drill team director said that my father desperately needed to talk to me. I remember hearing the words, but not wanting to understand them. My heart sank to the floor. I knew something was wrong, and so did everyone else. The walk to the phone seemed to take an hour, and the stares from fellow team members were subconsciously tearing me apart. As my father began to talk to me, I could hear the fear in his voice. He tried to hide his emotions, but I had been reading him for so long, I automatically knew. He finally told me the reason for his call. A blood test in Houston had shown traces of a pneumonia-like virus. If the doctors could not control the pneumonia with antibiotics, the virus would slowly destroy what was left of my mother's immune system, and within a week she would be dead. I hung up the phone and fell to the floor. I cried all day it seemed.

This was it, the final battle. The doctors and everyone else had decided that my mother wouldn't live through the pneumonia. Everyone had finally given up, except for my mom. She fought the pneumonia, graft versus host disease, and two grand mal seizures.

Today, my mom still has to take daily medications, make routine trips to Houston, and make weekly trips to Scott and White Hospital for blood tests. The one thing that keeps her going is her love of teaching. Everyday is a struggle for her, but the time she spends in the classroom is worth it to her. She has the strength to fight because she knows how much she is loved and appreciated. Her faith and love of life has kept her alive this long, and I can guarantee she'll be around a lot longer.

Some people who have heard this story think of it as the tragedy, but I view it as a victory. I admit that I've been through more than most people my mother's age. And there are some times when I just break down and cry. But on the whole, I've grown a lot in many ways. This experience has taught me many lessons. I've learned responsibility by running a household. I've learned strength by supporting my family emotionally. But, most importantly, I learned how to love by watching my mother. From the very beginning, my mother let us know how much she loved us. She told us that if she ever left this world, her love would be a shield that would keep us safe. I've never seen someone live as much as my mom did when she was confined to a hospital bed. She lived for

every minute of every day. I know a large number of people who don't realize how lucky they truly are. To be able to eat real food, to be able to walk outside on an early spring morning. These are things that many people can't enjoy because of illnesses or handicaps. My mother taught me how to love and she taught me how to live.

Response:

My teacher-self would scrawl "Well Done" across the top of this paper. "Good use of sources in paragraph 2," and "Consider reworking sentence order in paragraph 8." But I was not grading this paper. It was turned in to someone else; someone who is a stranger to me would put a grade on this paper. My copy of this paper doesn't have a grade on it. Meg wrote this paper about us during the one semester she spent away at college. If she had continued her education, worked toward a bachelor's degree, and generally followed everyone's "expectations" of this beautiful, intelligent, gentle, young woman, the freshman essay would have been just a love letter, an 8 ½ x 11 inch hug with a fold in the middle, tucked away in the top drawer of my desk, and I would cherish it just as much. But a persistent knee injury, sustained sometime during drill team high kicks or drop splits, led to erratic attendance, emergency room visits, and, finally, surgery during exam week of that semester and an abrupt end to Meg's time away at college. While she was coming out of the anesthesia, her

father and I were clearing out her dorm room. The plan was for her to take some classes locally and live at home for a while.

During what would have been the second semester of her freshman year, Meg eloped and dropped another set of freshman core courses. Before another year passed, by her 20th birthday, the day in February that had been so special six years earlier, Meg was a new mother herself. I reread her freshman English essay and blamed my cancer for her need to live life in a hurry. Her young husband was in the military, and soon they and my granddaughter went to Europe for three years. I knew there would be no opportunity for college courses while they were gone, but, somehow, I still hoped she would find time for school when they came back to the States.

And I read and reread her freshman essay and wondered if things could have been different.

FAST-FORWARD 10 YEARS

My Journal Entry August 2005:

Having a BA does not prevent gall bladder disease. That should be obvious, but somehow the correlation is rattling around in my head as I sit in my daughter's hospital room while she is in surgery. She's thirty years old and much too young to be having any kind of corrective surgery, and I'm a fifteen-year cancer survivor who is trying to focus a dissertation on the whys and wherefores of college retention among teachers' kids, so with several hours to kill, I'm remembering the years surrounding my beautiful daughter's high school

graduation -- well that's not quite true -- I'm remembering random snatches of her whole life and mine in an effort to reconstruct that college decision.

I am a teacher, and I try to sympathize with my students who are often groping for career choices and direction in life, but I can't quite empathize because I always knew that I wanted to teach; college was a necessary and welcome step toward my own classroom; the only questions had to do with what to major in and therefore what to teach. That there would be students and a lifetime divided into semesters in my future was inevitable.

Pregnant women worry. I never doubted I would love this child completely, but I did worry how I would handle a child who couldn't learn. I questioned whether I would be a good enough mother to deal with a disability. I read Dale Evans's *Angel Unaware*, her moving account of the short life of her Down's syndrome little girl, and I prayed I wouldn't be tested in that way.

We were blessed: both of our children were strong and healthy and bright, and I was grateful and relieved. I saw a future of their loving school, enjoying college, and finding success and happiness as an obvious and inevitable outcome of keeping them safe for twenty years or so.

Meg's freshman year in high school was her brother John's senior year and the year I first started teaching college English; life was going along nicely. My husband was about to retire after twenty years in the army, John was making plans for college, and Meg was enjoying high school -- then I was diagnosed

with leukemia and started an intense battle for survival that challenged each of us in numerous ways.

John graduated in June and went off to Tulane and Meg started her sophomore year, and I was actually back in the classroom just six months post bone marrow transplant. I was still taking powerful anti-rejection drugs for the transplant but was grateful to be alive, . . . and incapable of disciplining Meg at a time when she probably needed a stronger hand. By the time she was a senior, she suffered several anxiety attacks based on her perception that I would have a medical crisis during *her* senior year. She actually completed her senior year at home and graduated and planned to start college at North Texas. I wanted to believe our lives were back on track, and Meg talked of a degree in early childhood education and running an after-school dance program.

John was looking for a major he could stick with, and, at Thanksgiving, neither of my college students was actually earning any credits that semester. Meg had had several episodes with knee pain, and we scheduled a series of doctor's appointments that resulted in surgery during exam week which effectively ended her time at North Texas. She never directly said she didn't want to go to college, she just had other things she wanted to do first: like getting married and having a baby and starting her own life.

I just wanted her to be happy, and I wanted her to make her own choices. Somehow, I just knew she would come to her senses and find a college, but life

was moving too fast for her to take time for herself. I feel like I should have been more insistent. Her life would have been easier if she had a degree.

Response:

During those ten years, I had gone back to school, first for certification in developmental education and then as a doctoral student. I had begun to suspect that Meg's apparent aversion to higher education might have had its root in my teaching rather than in my cancer.

When I reread her essay, I was struck by her identification of my teaching as the most powerful link to my recovery. Doesn't she know how important my family is to me? There are students whose names I forget within weeks of the end of a semester. My children are mine forever. But she sees me as a teacher first. Is that the message I sent?

Early in my doctoral studies, I had identified a conundrum: when value is placed on education in the home, academic success for the children is usually enhanced, but, in my observations, children of teachers often struggled in school. And when I turned to the literature to answer this puzzle, I found no research on teachers' kids as a distinct group. For as many years as teachers have conducted research on students and learning, no one had turned the lenses inward. Why? My cancer experience had shown me that there can be strength and reassurance in talking with or reading about survivors. But there was no sharing of the struggles teachers had had with their own children's

academic choices. There was no analysis of the perceived extra pressures teachers' kids might feel in the classroom. I believe these are stories that should be told. So, here, we will tell some of those stories.

Preamble

Environment has a vital impact on each individual. We are the products of the environments in which we have lived. Our concept of life in the United States has been shaped by the society in which we have grown up. For many of us, post-secondary education seems to be fundamental to success in contemporary society, and seeking a college degree has become increasingly important. Studies show that there are growing numbers of potential college students in this country.

Statistics released in June 2005 by the census bureau revealed that there are a record number of children in elementary and secondary school in this country today. "A total of 49.6 million children attended private and public school in 2004, beating the previous high mark of 48.7 million set in 1970 when the baby boom generation was in school" (Feller). The AP reporter, Feller, concluded his report with a quote from Patrick Callan, President of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education: "These kids are coming along at a time when – unlike the baby boomers – their chances of a middle-class life

without college are almost nil” (Feller). While Callan's position as an advocate for higher education may sharpen his rhetoric, Callan's opinion is supported by a poll conducted by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education. The report released in March of 1998 is titled *The Price of Admission: The Growing Importance of Higher Education* and reveals that seventy-five percent of Americans believe that getting a college education is increasingly important and that eighty-six percent believe high school graduates should go to college.

In 2001, The National Center for Education Statistics released college enrollment projections based on the 1990 census:

Overall enrollment in degree-granting institutions – hereafter referred to as “college enrollment” – increased 18 percent between 1986 and 1999 and is expected to rise between 1999 and 2011. . . . The most important factor in the projected rise in college enrollment is the projected increase of 17 percent in the traditional college-age population of 18-to 24-year olds from 1999 to 2011 (Gerald and Hussar 4).

The potential number of teachers needed at all levels, therefore, is substantial.

Data on adult literacy often shows the impact a child's home life has had on his or her academic success. An article published in *Canadian Social Trends* in 1998 suggests that some parents create an environment for educational achievement:

Intellectual capital can be transmitted through the use of educational “investment strategies” that parents use to encourage children to learn. [...]a number of activities that may be considered proxies for the parents’ desire to further their children’s education: buying books for their children, setting aside time to read and limiting time spent watching television (deBroucker 13).

This article refers to an international study of literacy and suggests that such education motivators may be universal. Cabrera and LaNasa presented a review of the College Choice literature in 2000 and concluded that a three-stage process is usually in effect:

The literature suggests that decisions to go to college are the result of a three stage process that begins as early as a seventh-grade and ends when the high school graduate enrolls at an institution of higher learning. In undergoing each phase of the college-choice process, high school students develop predispositions to attend college, they search for general information about college, and make choices leading them to enroll at a given institution of higher education. [...] Parental encouragement, a pivotal force in the emergence of occupational and educational aspirations, is conditioned by the ability and high school preparation of the child, parental and sibling educational attainment, and access to information about college and costs.

Parental encouragement, the availability of information about college, and perceived cost-benefit analysis of attending college also shaped the institutions that the student and family will seriously consider. (Cabrera and La Nasa 5-6)

The parents' support and the environment within the family have the initial impact on student's post-secondary education choices.

Statement of the Problem

While many teachers were starting families and having children of their own, many of them continued to teach classes, attend conferences, read the research studies, and earn graduate degrees. As their own children moved through the educational system, did parental instinct and academic curiosity create a special tension for teachers and their offspring? On the one hand, were these parents always comparing their own children favorably with "average kids"? Like Garrison Keeler's fictional community, Lake Woebegone, where "all children are above normal," teachers' kids were expected to be smart. Did other teachers – their children's teachers – have added expectations of teachers' kids? On the other hand, were the teacher-parents painfully aware of what the studies were reporting about how to help your child be successful in school, and did they work to supply whatever environmental support was suggested by the

latest study? No one understands the importance of education more than educators themselves, but no research has been done about how these issues play out in families where one or both parents are educators.

Research has shown that parents do have an impact on their children's occupational decisions. Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider published *Becoming Adult: How Teenagers Prepare for the World of Work* in 2000. This book, detailing the first findings from an extensive study funded by the Sloan Foundation, identified adolescent views of work, their definitions of "work" and "play," and their ambitions for the future. The quantitative and qualitative data were gathered over a five year period (1992-1997) from "more than a thousand students in thirteen school districts across the United States"(3). In introducing the need for the study, and the role the family plays in these students' career decision making processes, Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider refer their readers back to the work of Thompson in 1963 describing the making of the working class in England:

Until about two centuries ago, children learned adult work skills within the family. A farmer's son helped his father in the fields, the mason's son apprenticed to be a mason, and girls learned from their mothers the complex skills required to run a household. It was not until the Industrial Revolution in the mid nineteenth century, and then only in the more industrialized nations, that most children had their first taste of work outside the family—and usually

a bitter taste at that.(Thompson, quoted in Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 113)

They continue their discussion of how adolescents become adults and explain the results of their own research concerning the role of the family in this process:

In today's economy, parents rarely teach their children the work skills they will need as adults. Instead, the role of the family in socializing children to an occupational future consists of arranging for schooling and of exposing children to the values, motivations, attitudes, and expectations that they will need to find a satisfying, productive niche when they reach adulthood. (Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 113)

These researchers and others involved with the Sloan study have important recommendations for helping students into adulthood. One dimension of the analysis of their findings produced a matrix of parental support and challenge, crossing high and low levels of each, which they labeled parenting style. Parenting-style studies and the available longitudinal correlation of parenting style and student success are important to my study.

In searching for studies which may have been done about adolescents who also share the life experience of being raised by one or more educators, I found nothing. While some research has been done on the lives and attitudes of "preachers' kids," little research has been done to identify the perspectives on education and life shared by "teachers' kids." How have their educational

expectations been shaped by a teacher-parent? Has easy familiarity with academic settings affected their transition to college or the work force? Has constant exposure to the field of education created academic burn out in these students prior to earning a degree?

Their constant exposure to the worlds of public education and the academy seems to have created, for some of them, a special tension between familiarity with and disdain for all things academic. For others, being teachers' kids seems to have evoked a self-assured lethargy, an attitude that "school" is always going to be available to them, so why hurry?

Purpose of This Study

The purpose of this study is to understand why some children of teachers, who, having been brought up in an environment where education is highly valued, nevertheless, choose not to pursue a college education right out of high school.

I will examine what impact having a teacher as a parent has had on young adults' construction of formal education and their decision to forego higher education immediately after high school. I will also ask the teacher-parents what response they had to that decision.

Research Questions

The questions of this study are as follows:

- (1) What experiences of education do these young adults, who are teachers' kids, have?
- (2) How has their family shaped their understanding of education and their attitudes toward it?
- (3) How did they choose not to pursue a college degree right out of high school and what meaning do they give to this decision?
- (4) What is/was the teacher-parent's response to this decision?

Significance of This Study

This study will contribute to our understanding of the intersection between teaching and parenting. Good teachers are admired for their ability to recognize and validate the potential in each of their students. Good teachers are expected to individualize their instruction to best maximize the potential in each student. Good teachers elicit from their students higher order thinking and decision-making. When these teacher-parents applied these same strategies to their own children facing a college choice decision, the results conflicted with societal expectations. Allowed to make their own decisions, these young adults chose

alternatives to pursuing a four-year degree. Recognizing their own level of maturity, these young adults chose to postpone or forgo higher education.

This study will, therefore, illuminate the college decision-making process that young adults go through when they are in an environment in which education is a prominent feature.

The questions of this study reflect the particular realities faced by teacher-parents and their children. I believe that teacher-parents and their children often experience education more intensely than other parents and students. I think it is important to examine the “intensifiers” involved. Furthermore, I believe that the lack of prior studies with this group of families needs to be addressed. Teacher-parents and their teacher kids have stories to tell, and the research literature doesn’t include these stories to date. Because I focused on a particular situation – the adolescent’s choice not to pursue a college degree right out of high school – which seemed inconsistent with expectations, the study took on aspects of studies of the marginalized, the outliers, the exceptions. There is no way to count the number of families facing this question, but the existence of these seven is sufficient to make the study important.

This study also looks to the narratives shared by the participants and shows the human reality of the same event seen from two perspectives and lived by two distinct individuals. Riessman explains why research participants tell stories: “Respondents narrativize particular experiences in their lives, often where there has been a breach between ideal and real, between self and

society” (Reissman 3). Most of the participants in this study have moved beyond the moment of that decision, and most of them have mended or bridged that breach. The study is important because other families may still be facing this issue, and they need to know that they are not alone.

Assumptions

I must assume that the subjects of this study were able to articulate their experiences. I understand the role of perception in any analysis of interpersonal communication, and I hope to have established enough trust in my integrity to allow for genuine answers to my interview questions.

My own experience with one child who took ten years to earn a BS and then only sixteen months to earn a Masters, and another child who chose marriage and motherhood over academics has helped me to understand this experience for others. It has also increased my level of credibility, particularly with my teacher-parent subjects. Nevertheless, I carefully listened to the variety of their narratives and interpretations especially when they differed from my personal experience. As a researcher, I had to remember that I was searching for more than a justification of my own experience; I was searching for the truth of being a teacher’s kid disinclined toward higher education in today’s degree-

driven environment and the truth of being that young adult's teacher-parent wanting the best for her child.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This study is informed by three distinct areas of research. I look first at developmental theories relating to college students. A second lens focuses on the family and the cross-generational expectations and values transmission assumed in sociology and psychology. Several important longitudinal studies inform this aspect of my study. Finally, I examine the literature on preachers' kids, believing that an examination of the particular stresses and benefits of having parents who are members of the clergy provides an analogous view of the lives of adolescents with teachers as parents.

College Student Developmental Theories

Arthur Chickering was among the first to target college students and to propose a psychosocial theory of student development. In the 1960s, he served as director of the project of student development in small colleges and collected data for his book published in 1969 and revised in 1993 entitled *Education and Identity*. Chickering and Reisser proposed seven vectors of development that contribute to the formation of a person's identity. Chickering and Reisser noted

that students move through these vectors at different rates, that vectors can interact with each other, and that students often find themselves re-examining issues associated with vectors. Although not rigidly sequential, vectors tend to build on each other leading to greater complexity, stability, and integration as the issues related to each vector are addressed (42-52).

He labeled the first vector “developing competence” based on an individual's self-confidence in three basic areas. Intellectual competencies include knowledge and skills related to specific subject matter; intellectual, cultural, and aesthetic sophistication; and increased skills in areas such as critical thinking and reasoning ability. Physical competence comes through athletic and recreational activities, attention to wellness, and involvement in artistic and manual activities. Interpersonal competence includes skills in communication, leadership, and working well with others (53-82). The second factor was labeled “managing emotions.” This work included, in addition to aggression and sexual desire, anxiety, depression, anger, shame, and guilt as well as more positive emotions such as caring, optimism, and inspiration (83-114).

The third vector, and one which is particularly important to this study, is an individual's ability to “move through autonomy toward interdependence.” This aspect of development results in increased emotional independence, which is defined as freedom from continual and pressing needs for reassurance of action or approval from others. Students also develop instrumental independence,

which includes self-direction, problem-solving ability, and mobility. And finally they come to recognize and accept the importance of interdependence and develop an awareness of their interconnectedness with others (115-144). The fourth vector is “developing mature interpersonal relationships.” This vector, which in the original version of the theory was called “freeing interpersonal relationships” and followed the “establishing identity” vector, has been placed earlier in the sequence to acknowledge that experience with relationships contributes significantly to the development of a sense of self. This vector allows for the development of interpersonal and cultural tolerance and an appreciation of differences and allows for the development of healthy and lasting intimate relationships with partners and close friends (145-172).

The fifth vector is “establishing identity.” This vector builds on each of the vectors that comes before it. In Chickering's and Reisser's revised theory, this vector has taken on added complexity to acknowledge differences in identity development based on gender, ethnic background, and sexual orientation. Identity includes comfort with body and appearance, comfort with gender and sexual orientation, a sense of one's social and cultural heritage, a clear self-concept and comfort with one's roles and lifestyle, a secure sense of self in light of feedback from significant others, self acceptance and self-esteem and personal stability and integration (173-208). The next vector is entitled “developing purpose.” This one also fits very strongly into this study because it deals with developing clear vocational goals, making meaningful commitments

to specific personal interests and activities, and establishing strong interpersonal commitments. It includes intentionally making and staying with decisions even in the face of opposition. The term vocation is used broadly to refer to paid or unpaid work within the context of a specific career or more generally as a person's life calling. Lifestyle and family influences affect the decision-making and goal-setting processes involved in developing purpose (209-234). The seventh and final vector in Chickering's and Reisser's design is entitled "developing integrity." This vector includes three sequential but overlapping stages: humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing congruence. In the last stage, values and actions become congruent and authentic as self-interest is balanced by a sense of social responsibility (235-264). The simplicity and ready applicability of Chickering's vectors have made them important in the world of student development:

Chickering's theory has had a significant impact on the development of proactive and intentional interventions in higher education. Because of the practical approach Chickering has taken, his theory is easy to understand and use. As a result he has become perhaps the most highly regarded student development theorist to date" (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito 52).

In recent years, particular attention has been paid to the young adults who carry the sometimes pejorative label "Gen X." Schneider and Stevenson

published a study of Gen Xers entitled *The Ambitious Generation*, but it was the subtitle -- *America's Teenagers, Motivated but Directionless* -- that prompted heated discussion about the authors' findings. Using alarming statistics from the labor market and educational research, statements like the following raised genuine concern:

As a generation, today's adolescents desire to be professionals in numbers far greater than the number of jobs projected for professionals in 2005. Six times more adolescents want to be doctors and five times more want to be lawyers than there are projected to be openings in these professions. (Schneider and Stevenson 6)

They concluded that it is necessary for parents and schools to help teens acquire "aligned ambitions" early in their schooling so that secondary curriculum choices match with attainable postsecondary education requirements. These researchers insist that students as young as eighth grade need to be aware of career paths available for them.

Within two years of publication of *The Ambitious Generation*, Peter Dwyer and Johanna Wyn, researchers in Australia, published *Youth, Education, and Risk: Facing the Future*. Their book is a cross-cultural look at the lives of Gen Xers according to "researchers in the US, the UK, Europe, Canada, and Australasia (2)" who have "become increasingly aware of common strands of evidence about the lives of young people in the different nations (2)."

Dwyer and Wyn conclude that much of the research about adolescents and young adults is misinterpreted because of the use of linear transition expectations which are no longer reflective of the reality of young adulthood in Western societies:

There are now significant overlaps in the lives of both young and old between characteristics of life that were in former times separated out from each other and assigned to different stages of the life-course.[. . .]

Much of the academic literature and public commentary takes account of these upheavals. There is, however, an obvious reluctance to let go of established assumptions about what "ought to be," and a failure to learn from the ways that those who have grown up in this new kind of social environment are coming to terms with it.

A fundamental reason for this neglect is that by defining youth in terms of "age" and then of prolonging the "student" years into their twenties, the broader experience and competing life concerns of the actual participants tend to be bracketed out. The narrowly focused imagery of linear pathways is perpetuated despite evidence from researchers in youth studies to the contrary. It is important therefore to attempt to bridge the gap between the psychological, education and economics literature (and the

subsequent policy formulations) and contrasting findings from the broader field of youth research. (170)

These researchers' careful review of ten years of research in multiple Western societies poses some important questions for education policies and practices that impact the lives of young adults.

Family Studies

An examination of family dynamics and supportive environments for children and adolescents has resulted in much sociological and educational research during the last two decades.

An important national study funded by the Alfred P. Sloan foundation at the University of Chicago asked a research team consisting of Charles Bidwell, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Larry Hedges, and Barbara Schneider to study career formation among adolescents. This study began in 1992 and the results of the first year were published in 2000 in a book entitled *Becoming Adult*. The longitudinal study was conducted at 13 sites in 12 states and included 33 schools. The subjects were in grades 6, 8, 10, and 12. A focus group of +1200 and a cohort group of +3600 were identified and both groups were given a series of questionnaires. In addition, the focus group was asked to participate in an experience sampling method study. In this study, each student was given a

wristwatch beeper to wear for a week. When the student was beeped, he or she was asked to complete a one-page response form. The students were beeped eight times a day between 7:30 a.m. and 10:30 p.m. at what to them were random intervals. They were asked to respond to find out what they were doing and how they felt at that moment. Csikszentmihalyi's research on flow, the combination of challenge and satisfaction in a given work or play activity, was important in the analysis of the experience sampling method (ESM). The students in the focus group also participated in qualitative interviews. The research teams also interviewed parents, teachers, counselors, and administrators at all sites. The analysis of the first year data is divided into three parts: part one, adolescent views of work; part two, learning to work; and part three, transitioning from high school. There is a growing body of literature attesting to the reliability and validity of the ESM method.

In Chapter 3 of *Becoming Adult*, the research team makes some generalizations about adolescents' views of work. "The average teenager has quite positive educational, occupational, and lifestyle expectations" and "Neither age nor gender is associated with what teenagers expect their futures to be like." This national longitudinal study provides a wealth of data to anyone exploring the minds and lives of young adults. Schneider and Stevenson's *The Ambitious Generation* is drawn for data obtained by the Sloan study.

Important to my study is Chapter 6 in *Becoming Adult* entitled "Families and the Forming of Children's Occupational Future." The chapter begins with

the observation that until about two centuries ago children learned adult work skills within the family:

A farmer's son helped his father in the fields, the mason's son apprenticed to be a mason, and girls learned from their mothers the complex skills required to run a household. It was not until the industrial revolution in the mid-19th century and then only in the more industrialized nations that most children had their first taste of work outside the family and usually a bitter taste it that.

(Thompson, quoted in Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 113)

In today's economy, the family's role is to provide schooling and instill values and attitudes rather than specific job skills. Parents are expected to socialize children to an occupational future that will be satisfying and productive when they reach adulthood.

As adolescents' needs and social participation broaden beyond the family, the question arises whether families continue to influence adolescent development; do outside patterns of social interaction mute the family's effects on individual occupational decisions? Family support refers specifically to the parents' responsiveness to the children, but more broadly includes the responsiveness of the entire family. In a responsive family, the adolescent is comfortable in the home, spends time with other family members, and feels loved and cared for. Challenge refers to the stimulation and discipline or training that parents and other family members direct towards the teen. Its aim is to

foster autonomy and self-direction. Challenge also includes the expectations the adolescent perceives family members to have of him or her and the teen's desire to fulfill those expectations. A family environment is challenging when parents expect adolescents to take on greater responsibilities, learn new skills, and take risks that lead to greater individuation. The researchers devised a Support/Challenge Questionnaire:

The thirty-two items that make up the SCQ measure support and challenge separately on an "agree" or "disagree" scale. For instance, with regard to support, adolescents either agreed or disagreed with statements such as: "In my family I feel appreciated for who I am" or "We enjoy having dinner together and talking." With regard to challenge, they responded to such statements as: "In my family, I am expected to do my best," or "We express our opinions about current events, even when they differ." Items were worded both positively and negatively, and they were phrased to address family dynamics as a whole.(Csikszentmihalyi and Schneider 116)

The results of the study highlighted four family types derived from a matrix of support and challenge and identified variables significantly related to family type. When adolescents perceive their families as providing high challenge and high support, they are likely to report being engaged in work-like activities, report higher self-esteem, and report higher salience in their main

activities. When adolescents perceive their families as providing high support only, they are more optimistic, they are more open to new experiences, they are more intrinsically motivated, and may be more socially motivated. When adolescents perceive their families as providing high challenge only, they are likely to report time spent on activities that are both work and play, to report less time spent on activities that are neither work nor play, to be in a better mood on average during the week, and to be less pessimistic.

In high challenge/high support families, parents and adolescents speak of themselves and their actions as being highly intentional. Parents in these families express their own strong motivation and expect children to learn from their example. Parents and teenagers appeared deeply involved in each other's lives. Families high in both support and challenge expressed strong beliefs in the full development of individual potentialities and in the right for everyone to achieve happiness. In these families expectations are clearly articulated but are linked to an expressed need for individual freedom. Personal fulfillment is joined to a sense of responsibility; they act purposefully and trust their ability to handle the unexpected.

In high challenge/low support families, the definition of success often goes beyond financial and status achievements to reflect a genuine need to develop any potential to the utmost. Signs of strain include a somewhat excessive competitiveness even with siblings and the perception on the students' part that the parents are pushing too hard and that their expectations

are inordinately high. In some families, parents' disappointment at the reality of a teen's motivation, academic performance, or future goals may explain in part why the children perceive a lack of support in the home. This disappointment may also be at the root of many parents' desires for their adolescent to do something useful in the future. Adolescents in these families have a solid grasp of what is expected of them, and while they may identify in part with these expectations, they do not appear to embrace them wholeheartedly as their own, and in some cases, they just reject them.

In low challenge/high support families, parents want their children to do their best no matter what the outcome. In these families, however, parents seem to emphasize not wanting to push, and children agree that they are not being pushed by parents. Parents yield to their teen's interests and often encourage an interest in social service jobs: teacher, nurse, and helping professions in general. There is much talk about trust and respect in the home and one gets the impression that family members discuss and share information on a regular basis. Some students in this group complained that parents are too involved in their lives; the focus of these families is defined in terms of the strength of their internal relationships. Though not perfect, these families seem to offer enviable stability and emotional support especially in comparison with those low in support.

In low challenge/low support families, members are not well positioned to prepare children for a positive future. Parents are often absent, and even when

physically present seem uninvolved and uncommunicative. Students spend little time with their families. Much more than any other family types, goals are vague, expectations are phrased in terms of whatever direction the child takes is all right, and interview questions are often answered with “I don't know.” The research team also sensed that the most detrimental aspect of these families is a lack of spirit, cohesion, and purpose. More interaction between parents and teens, and more dedication to common goals might greatly improve the quality of these students' lives and their future prospects. These and other results linking family type to the student outcomes were found after controlling for other main variables such as gender, age, race, and the ethnicity and parental education; in other words, family dynamic variables can explain adolescent outcomes independent of these structural variables. This suggests that the atmosphere parents create in the family can make a positive difference in their children's adult lives regardless of what disadvantages the family may suffer. The findings also suggest that it is worthwhile to explore the complexities of family dynamics in greater depth because the way in which children and adolescents experience interactions at home may have a decisive impact on their future and well-being.

Another study that speaks to the impact of family on teens and adolescents was published in 2002 under the title *How Families Still Matter*. This longitudinal study of youth in two generations was conducted by Vern L.

Bengtson, Timothy J. Biblarz, and Robert E. L. Roberts. In the preface to this publication the authors identify their research questions:

In this study we focus on comparing family influences on members of today's youth, Generation X, born in the 1970s and 1980s, with family influences on their parents, Baby Boomers born in the 1940s and 1950s. We ask four questions: (1) How different are today's youth from previous generations? Are they a "generation at risk"? (2) How have the changes in family structure and roles -- particularly divorce and maternal employment -- affected successive generations of youth? (3) Has there been a decline over generations in parents' influence on youth? (4) What are the gender differences in achievement orientations and family influence across generations? (Bengtson, Biblarz, and Roberts xix)

These research questions are admirably addressed. Important to this study is a statement by the authors of this text re-asserting the impact of family influence:

The family has traditionally been one of the most important sources of influence on children's aspirations. While a variety of extra-family institutions (such as peer groups, residential contexts, and the media) affect children's aspirations as well, studies have found that the effect of parental expectations on children's aspirations tend to be about twice as great as the effect of peer groups and teachers (Sewell and Hauser 1980). Parents shape

children's aspirations directly, through processes of children's learning from parents, reinforcement, identification, and role modeling (Bandura 1967; Bandura and Huston 1961). Parents also place children in social contexts (schools, neighborhoods, churches, clubs) that are congruent with the family's position in the social structure, so that family and extra-family effects become mutually reinforcing.(Bengston, Biblarz, and Roberts 60)

The authors recognize the continuing influence of family on the aspirations of teens and young adults.

This LSOG (Longitudinal Study of Youth in Two Generations) study was conducted in six waves: 1971, 1985, 1988, 1991, 1994, and 1997. The initial study focused on three generation families in Southern California. The researchers randomly selected a one in six sample of Kaiser Medical Group enrollees. The resulting sample included 516 grandparents, 701 of their middle-aged children, and 827 of their early adult or late adolescent grandchildren. Sample attrition has been highest among the oldest generations due to death and incapacity (as of 2000, only 53 out of the 516 original grandparents are still living and just 43 remain able to participate). Over the years many qualitative and quantitative studies have been conducted with the Longitudinal Study of Generation's families. These studies "reflect the richness and complexity of the lives of the LSOG families, and more generally, late 20th century American family life." (Bengston, Biblarz, and Roberts 176)

The study concludes with some propositions about *why* families still matter, having discussed in great detail *how* families still matter:

Below we offer three propositions about why families still matter, why Generation X children have done well, and why divorce and maternal employment have not had (at least in our sample) the severe detrimental effects on children predicted by some commentators and researchers. We set forth these propositions as important issues to be tested in future research.

Proposition one: Families are adapting by expanding support across generations. There is increasing interdependence and exchange across several generations of family members; this expansion has protected and enhanced the well-being of new generations of children.

Proposition two: Non-divorced, two-parent families are more successful than their counterparts a generation ago. Relational processes within two-parent families are changing over time in ways that have enhanced the well-being of new generations of children.

Proposition three: Maternal investment in children has not declined over generations. Despite growth in the rate of labor force participation among mothers, maternal investment in children has remained high and constant over time, this has assured a

generally positive level of well-being among new generations of children.(Bengston, Biblarz, and Roberts 160)

These propositions suggest that it is within the context of “family,” regardless of changes the may evolve in the definition of that term, that young people establish a foundation. The researchers conclude:

The family is the fulcrum balancing change and continuity over time in human society. It has been so in the past; we believe it will be so in the 21st century. We look to the family as the context for negotiating the problems of continuity and change, of individuality and integration, between and within the generations, in ways that allow the continuous re-creation of society. Families still matter.
(Bengston, Biblarz, and Roberts 168)

Bengston and his coauthors suggest a connection between parental education and young people’s ambition:

Previous studies have shown that parental education is among the most important influences on children's developmental outcomes. Parental education is positively associated with authoritative parenting (in contrast to authoritarian parenting), characterized by high involvement, affection, and support, and related to noncoercive supervision. In our data, heightened parental education was one of the keys to understanding Generation Xers’ very high levels of educational and occupational ambitions and

self-esteem. Those who portray divorce and maternal employment as the source of contemporary family weakness had tended to overlook some of the characteristics that make up the environment of today's youth, such as these relatively high levels of parental education. (Bengston, Biblarz, and Roberts 138)

In general, the wealth of data gathered in the longitudinal study of generations will provide baseline information for countless studies yet to be designed.

Preachers' Kids

In lieu of an existing body of research on the lives of teachers and their families, I chose to investigate a parallel line of inquiry involving the children of the clergy. As recently as 1998, Carol Anderson published the results of a study of adult pastors' children. Her survey of nearly 500 PK's (preachers' kids) examined the lives these adults remembered growing up, and attempted to measure their religious commitment as adults. Her findings suggested that one of the strongest influences was the PK's perception that more was expected of him or her. Anderson designed a survey consisting of 39 statements reflecting 10 categories of problems experienced by PK's while they were growing up. These categories were: 1) intimacy with each parent; 2) parents' marriage; 3) relationships with friends and relatives; 4) moves; 5) parental consistency; 6)

family time; 7) privacy; 8) expectations; 9) respect; and 10) church member support. The survey was designed on a five point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. An additional 21 questions dealt with respondents' religious practices in the present. The survey concluded with five open ended questions which were analyzed qualitatively. This study examined the home lives of children whose parent's occupation was distinctive. Anderson concludes:

Their responses suggest that if their parents have established a warm, loving, relationship with them, have given them the freedom to be themselves and to make choices, have made them feel important and spent time with them, have portrayed a genuine and consistent spiritual role model, and finally, have maintained boundaries between church and home, they will be more likely to be religiously committed. (404)

It is possible that a teacher's kid's commitment to education is in some way analogous to the preacher's kid's religious commitment.

In 1992, McCown and Sharma published an article detailing their research with preachers' kids. Entitled "Children in the Public Eye: the Functioning of Pastors Children," their study describes the social competencies and behavioral problems of a national sample of 98 pastors' children and compares them to age and sex standardized norms using an instrument called The Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). "There is no difference between the

behavior of pastors children in comparison to standardized norms on the CBCL"(35). The authors further speculate:

Resources that may be present in pastoral families include well educated parents with stable marriages, extensive social networks, and spiritual strengths. Two resources of education and marital stability were found in the sample studied. Although expectations of children may be higher from both the family and the community, it is also likely that these expectations have been consistent and unambiguous so the children have been able to acclimate to them. From an early age on, children are likely to have had numerous opportunities for socialization, and parents may have been able to model expected behaviors and ways of dealing with others. (39)

The authors conclude that these results are very positive and hope that the results of this study will encourage positive perceptions about pastors' children.

Three personal vignettes were published together in 1998 with the overarching title "We Grew Up in a Pastor's Home: Three Candid Reports on the Lasting Impact." John Morgan remembered: "I was a preacher's kid with many religious experiences, but the things that affected me most were the nonreligious experiences with my dad. My dad could teach spiritual principles for the most ordinary circumstances" (103). A second, less positive memory, was presented by someone using a pseudonym, Lena Butler. She centers her narrative on the

kindness and affection members of her father's congregation shared at his funeral. But her closing paragraph is bittersweet:

To Dad every request from a member constituted a command performance. Family plans were canceled without question. Protests were pointless. Even the youngest child could recite Dad's response: "Don't you understand? God called me to serve these people. My work is to do the Lord's work. How can I refuse? They need me." And he would be gone. (104)

The third tribute is from a man who is now himself a pastor of the same inner-city church where his father served thirty years earlier. Ralph Nite, Jr., speaks lovingly of his father's willingness to serve Christ through his service to the people of his small congregation (105). These three narratives reveal the range of experiences shared by preachers' kids and may mirror the same broad scope of family dynamics among teachers' kids.

A husband and wife team wrote an interesting advice article for pastors and their families, based on a simple question "What Do You Expect from a PK?" They queried their three grown daughters and together they identified three "pressurizers" for PKs: 1. The community in general, 2. The church the pastor serves, and 3. The pastoral family itself. With added pressure coming from multiple sources, the perceived higher expectations are undeniable. Conway says this of a pastor who sacrifices his family to keep his congregation happy:

The pastor who preaches on the disaster of divorce and the necessity of family solidarity while at the same time working 70-100 hours a week and setting unrealistic expectations for his family is a walking tragedy. (Conway and Conway 85)

Another research study conducted by Kimberly Sparrow Strange under the direction of Dr. Lori Shepherd in 2001 at Appalachian State University wanted to discover if a negative stereotype exists when evaluating the children of clergy. Strange's participants were 63 college undergraduates, 25 of whom were PK's themselves. Participants were told that they would be evaluating a hypothetical college application. Each participant was given a packet which consisted of a consent form, a mock college application, and various questions concerning the evaluation of the applicant. Participants were told to review the application, to evaluate the applicant to the best of their knowledge using the character traits listed, and then to decide whether or not the applicant should be admitted to the program. Target manipulation was achieved by an item on the application which stated the occupation of the applicant's parents. Each of the participants evaluated only one target from among three possibilities. The three targets were as follows: a PK with bad behavior, a non-PK with bad behavior, and a neutral target. The hypothesis was that PK's with bad behavior would be rated more harshly than the non-PK's. The results of this quantitative study did not significantly support the negative stereotype hypothesis, except that the "bad PK" was rated less intelligent than the non-PK with bad behavior. However, the

follow-up PK Questionnaire, administered to the PK participants only, yielded some interesting and helpful findings regarding the stresses of growing up a PK. “The PKs reported that their lives were stressful, and they also reported that they felt as if people watched their actions closely and had high expectations of them” (58). These observations parallel Anderson’s questionnaire categories as well. Strange concluded: “As long as religion is a major force in our society, the minister and his or her family is an issue that will need to be addressed in research” (59). Some of these same stresses are experienced by teachers’ kids.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In their succinctly titled *Designing Qualitative Research*, Marshall and Rossman offer the following advice about research methods:

How do researchers maintain the needed flexibility of research design so that the research can "unfold, roll, and emerge" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.210) and yet convince others that they know what they are doing? They must do so in the section of the research proposal detailing the way the study will be conducted -- typically called the research design, or research methods. This section must convince the reader that the researcher is competent to undertake the research, capable of employing the methods arrayed, and sufficiently interested to sustain the effort necessary for the successful completion of the study.

The researcher needs to convince the reader that she has a need and the right to design the research *as it evolves*, building in flexibility is crucial. (Marshall and Rossman 45)

As I have been involved with developmental education during the last twenty years, I have been exposed to the surveys and studies in developmental psychology which claim to be able to predict high academic achievement for students, given average or above-average intelligence, based on factors such as "access to books in the home," (Artelt, Schiefele, and Schneider) or "value placed on education in the home," or "parents' schooling." Surely, these "teachers' kids" have parents who value education and homes full of books and educational games and toys. Other sociological studies speak of high rates of participation in higher education growing out of society's demands for credentials beyond high school: an associate's degree, a baccalaureate degree or beyond. Surely, these "teachers' kids" live in this same society and feel these same pressures. My question, then, is where is the disconnect? What is it in the lives of these young adults that influenced them to choose not to pursue a degree with enthusiasm, urgency, and dedication? This is the developmental phase during which we ask our young adults to make lifetime decisions. Has something in the lives of these teachers' kids led them to make an unexpected choice about post-secondary education?

Since these inconsistencies in the lives of my participants became the basis for the research questions I chose to explore, the research methodology needed to be qualitative. Merriam explained in *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* in 1998: "It is assumed that meaning is embedded in people's experiences and that this meaning is mediated through

the investigator's own perceptions" (6). The author then quotes Patton who defines qualitative research as follows:

Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context of and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting -- what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting -- and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (Patton quoted in Merriam 6)

It is also important that I have lived this phenomenon myself. I teach. I have taught for thirty-five years in a variety of geographical locations and a range of educational settings. And I have children of my own who have made choices of their own about higher education. This research honors them and their choices as it explores what being a teacher's kid is like for children today. I have concerns about how knowledge is produced – and by whom – through research. I want this study to reflect the fact that knowledge was co-constructed by the teacher-parents, their young adult children, and myself. Qualitative research asserts that reality is constructed by individuals, and that there are,

therefore, multiple realities – none any truer than another – that may be discovered through research. Since I have an important personal investment in these questions, the research paradigm had to be qualitative.

Bogdan and Biklen delineate five characteristics of Qualitative Research:

1. Naturalistic. Qualitative research has actual settings as the direct source of the data and the researcher is the key instrument.
2. Descriptive Data. Qualitative research is descriptive. The data collected take the form of words or pictures rather than numbers. The written results of research containing quotations from the data to illustrate and substantiate the presentation.
3. Concern with Process. Qualitative researchers are concerned with process rather than simply with outcomes or products.
4. Inductive. Qualitative researchers tend to analyze their data inductively. They do not search out data or evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses they hold before entering the study; rather, the abstractions are built as the particulars that have been gathered are grouped together.
5. Meaning. Meaning is the essential concern to the qualitative approach. Researchers who use this approach are interested in how different people make sense of their lives. In other words, qualitative researchers are concerned with what are

called participant perspectives. Qualitative researchers are concerned with making sure they capture perspectives accurately. (4-7)

These attributes of qualitative study are evident in this study of student and teacher-parent perspectives.

Data Collection

This is a purely qualitative study of attitudes about school and learning as expressed by “teachers’ kids” who chose not to follow an established pattern and earn a four-year degree immediately after high school and of their teacher-parents who had various responses to that decision. They each participated in a semi-structured interview about their education experiences, either of being a “teacher’s kid” or of teaching while raising children, and about the decisions dealing with college or other post-secondary-schooling life choices.

Participants

For this study, I interviewed one young adult and one teacher-parent in seven families. These families didn’t know each other, and no one was pressured to participate. The selection of participants was based on my becoming aware that their situation fit into the pattern I was focusing on for this

research. These families were brought to my attention through networking among fellow teachers and friends and, once I actually started doing the initial interviews, through snowball sampling. This term refers to the researcher's becoming aware of other possible participants through a "referral" from an already engaged participant. The next step was for me to write each teacher-parent a letter of invitation explaining my purpose and asking for their involvement. If there were any hesitation, I thanked them for their time and moved on to other possible families. Most people who received my invitation were enthusiastic and supportive of my research.

The teachers in this particular study are all women, and they are public school educators whose teaching loads span second grade through high school. One is a librarian who formerly taught second graders; another is a counselor who taught middle school students. Two of these women are Hispanic, and the other five are White. When my children were still in school, I taught middle school and junior high when I was not teaching adult basic skills classes. Those I interviewed have been teaching most recently in two adjacent school districts in Central Texas. The larger district serves 35,000 students on nearly fifty campuses. The smaller district has approximately 7,500 students in twelve schools. Both districts serve the families of Fort Hood and the local communities. In contrast, one family in this study lives in a rural New England town, which until just recently, had a one building, pre-K through high school enrollment of approximately 300 students. The teachers in this study earned

their initial degrees or teaching credentials in many different states and most have taught in additional locations other than the districts they most recently served.

Of the seven young adults in this study, four are male and three are female. Since my initial contact with each family was through the teacher-parents, I had no prior knowledge of the gender of the students involved. The life choices made by the young women in this study are somewhat parallel. Each of them married young, had a child and dropped out of college. Each of them has been divorced, is remarried, and now has two children. Two of them have earned associate's degrees.

Three of the young men in this study have been out of high school longer than the fourth. The oldest has been in the military since high school and has taken advantage of schooling opportunities offered through the military and has the equivalent of an associate's degree. The youngest spent four years traveling across country, and home again, and is still exploring educational possibilities. The other two are well-established with a career despite the lack of a bachelor's degree. Two of the older three are married with children.

The ages of the participants in this study put the parents into the demographic usually labeled "baby Boomers," and their young-adult off-spring have been called Generation X. Each of the young adults is at least four years out of high school, some as much as ten years out of high school. Each of the teacher-parents continued her education and earned advanced degrees,

additional certifications, and specializations while raising a family and working as a teacher.

The participants each have been identified as "teachers' kids" and young adults or as their teacher-parents. The names assigned to participants in this study have been chosen to help the reader recognize which responses are from the young adults and which responses are from the teacher-parents: the teacher-parents' names are each one syllable; the young adults' names are three syllables long. The participants each signed a consent form for the interviews to be audio recorded, and they understood that the confidentiality of this study has been and will be protected.

Interviews

This study explores four research questions through individual interviews during which I asked a series of open ended questions relating to the life experiences of my participants. The opening questions of each interview were designed to establish some connection between me and the interviewee. As the interviews progressed, I asked each participant to remember good and bad times connected with either being a teacher's kid or raising a teacher's kid. These responses shed light on the first two research questions:

- (1) What experiences of education do these young adults, who happen to be teachers' kids, have?

- (2) How has their family shaped their understanding of education and their attitudes toward it?

The participants in this study were very willing to talk about their school experiences and their child's experiences of being a teacher's kid. Each one seems to recognize that there were some additional expectations of good behavior and academic achievement placed on teacher's kids.

Methodologically, asking these questions first allowed me to position myself as an ally in our exploration of this phenomenon. Remembering what was good about being a teacher's kid created a positive atmosphere before the questions turned to the specific issue at the root of this study: the decision not to finish a degree right after high school.

My lead-in to the questions about college varied from interview to interview, but they were generally the most open ended. Phrases such as: "Tell me about the college thing" or "What you remember about senior year?" or "When did you decide you didn't want to be in college?" each led to a narrative, sometimes extended, of the college decision. Analysis of these narratives answered the final two research questions:

- (3) How did they choose not to pursue a college degree right out of high school and what meaning do they give to this decision?
- (4) What is/was the teacher-parent's response to this decision?

Most of the interviews were face-to-face and lasted about an hour. Two of the interviews, not from the same family, were conducted by telephone.

These participants were people with whom I was previously acquainted and for whom the logistics of getting together were problematic. The consent forms were mailed and a time for the telephone interview was set up well in advance. One interviewee chose to have me send the interview schedule by mail and responded in writing. Audiotapes and wave files were sent out for transcription. (See Appendices for invitation letters, consent forms, and interview schedules.)

Data Analysis

Merriam explains how to deal with the data which has been collected during a qualitative study. She describes the constant comparative method of data analysis:

The basic strategy of the method is to do just what its name implies -- constantly compare. The researcher begins with a particular incident from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with another incident in the same set of data or in another set. These comparisons lead to tentative categories that are then compared to each other and to other instances.

Comparisons are constantly made within and between levels of conceptualization until a theory can be formulated. (Merriam 159)

This qualitative study has been developed using the constant comparative method of data analysis developed by Glaser in 1978. He lists the steps in this method as follows:

1. Begin collecting data.
2. Look for key issues, recurrent events, or activities in the data that become categories for focus.
3. Collect data that provide many incidents of the categories of focus, with an eye to seeing the diversity of the dimensions under the categories.
4. Write about the categories you are exploring, attempting to describe and account for all the incidents you have in your data while continually searching for new incidents.
5. Work with the data and emerging model to discover basic social processes and relationships.
6. Engage in a sampling, coding, and writing as the analysis focuses on the core categories. (Glaser quoted in Bogdan and Biklen 67)

Although this process is described as linear, what actually happens goes on all at once and is intrinsically recursive.

The next step was to look to the transcripts to discern commonalities of the experience and attitude among the participants, which led to further insight into the phenomenon I have chosen to explore. The questions related to

education in general, the initial parts of each interview, allowed me to collect a variety of examples to illustrate the experience of being a teacher's kid. For the young adult participants in this study, the elementary and secondary school experiences had been generally positive. One unpleasant aspect was a sense of exposure, an inability to hide misguided behavior or unrealized academic potential. The young adults did speak of some positive results of this “exposure”: Since it was understood that whatever they did, mom would probably find out, they usually decided to make positive, productive choices.

One way to gain insight into the parenting style of the teacher-parents was to ask for their description of an ideal teacher. For most of my teacher-parent participants, this question posed no threat; whereas, a direct question about their parenting may have been interpreted as accusatory. The resulting descriptions of teachers acutely aware of individual differences among their students predicted parents more open to individual decision-making by their children.

The narrative nature of most of my participants’ description of “the college decision” allows for some further analysis and some comparison and contrast between the accounts given by the young adult and his or her teacher-parent. Riessman, in her *Narrative Analysis*, cautions researchers to treat narratives as more than just content. The selectivity a researcher applies to reporting a narrative depends on a range of contingencies:

Ultimately, of course, the features of an informant's narrative account an investigator chooses to write about are linked to the evolving research question, theoretical/epistemological positions the investigator values, and, more often than not, her personal biography. If this circularity makes some readers uncomfortable, I can only offer the comfort of a long tradition of interpretive and hermeneutic inquiry. (Riessman 61)

So, here are the findings of this research, selectively presented by this researcher to answer the established research questions. May I introduce: the teacher-parents: Ann, Beth, Joan, Lynn, Marge, Rose, Sue, and the young adults: Christopher, Jeremy, Jessica, Melanie, Raphael, Stephanie, and Timothy.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

In this study, I focus on young adults who have at least one parent who is a teacher and who, when they graduated from high school, either chose not to attend college right away or enrolled in college then left within the first few semesters. Two major findings emerge. For the young adult, all valued education but they had no sense of urgency about pursuing formal education immediately. Their decisions were shaped by particular life circumstances and, for many, a belief that a college education was irrelevant at that point in their lives. The second finding concerns the teacher-parents. These educators assumed that their children would go on to college, but they didn't pressure them to do so; their primary concern was that their children be happy. Like their children, they also recognize that college is always an option.

In this chapter I will elaborate on these findings using the structure of my interview questions. The first two questions deal with what it's like to be a teacher's kid; the second two address the college decision making process, for the young adults and for their teacher-parents. I have assigned pseudonyms to all the participants. To aid the reader in identifying the role of each speaker, all of the teacher-parents' names are one syllable, while the names of the young adults are three syllables long.

This study asked, first of all, how being a teacher's kid may have affected each young adult's experience with and perception of formal education. All of the participants, young adults and teacher-parents alike, recognized the special situations that arose from their being in the same building. The interview questions also sought to explore the special tension felt by the teacher-parents in their dealings with colleagues who had their children in class. Another interview question asked the participants to recall anything that made their home different from other homes without a teacher-parent.

The first research questions deal with the participants' memories of their "school days." We will begin this discussion with another look at the first research question.

Research Question #1: What Experiences of Education Do These Young Adults, Who Happen to be Teachers' Kids, Have?

For each of the young adult participants in this study, the experience of schooling was generally positive. Most of the participants at some point in their schooling were in special classes for talented and gifted students. Although they sometimes wrestled with a particular subject or clashed with a particular teacher, school was generally not a site of struggle.

It is important to establish what the expectations of education were for both the young adult and his or her teacher-parent. That is why the first interview question asked each participant to describe an ideal teacher.

How would you describe an ideal teacher?

Each teacher-parent's definition of "good teaching" and "ideal teachers" opened a door to her probable parenting style, and the young adults' evaluation of the teacher-parent's ability to differentiate between the two roles also helped to define the educational environment within the home during his or her school years. These retrospective interviews reveal some amazing consistencies.

Each of the teacher-parents was asked to describe an ideal teacher. The question was open-ended; I did not specify whether I wanted them to describe a teacher or mentor they had had, a teacher their children had had, or an idealized, "perfect" teacher. Marge described teachers she remembered: "A few of them stood out in my mind and I think the reason they did was that they were the ones who took probably the best interest in what the children were doing. They were kind but yet they had good discipline." Lynn echoed the importance of working with individual students:

Someone who showed that they cared about students and gave time to all students regardless of their difficulties. Someone who made me feel special would be the role model that I remember from my education, the ones that really stick out in my mind are the

ones that just really made that extra effort to care about, it seemed like, each student. And then the ones that did learning through songs, through activities, through group learning, those kinds of teachers stick out in my mind.

Sue also valued selflessness as an important teacher trait:

An ideal teacher would be one who places the children first. They would think of each one of them as an individual, unique in him or herself, and then strive to build a relationship first. I think that's important before learning can take place at a level that it needs to. One that tried to create interesting learning situations get out of the box some in order for the children, the audience, to hook into that.

Sue later observed that good teachers: "understand that they [some students] have problems in their lives that may interfere with learning, and tried to make allowances for that, but yet be firm. And, when you discipline them, discipline with love and respect."

Ann's ideal teacher response started with a list of adjectives:

Compassionate, dedicated, thorough, creative. An ideal teacher is hard-working; she does professional development so that she keeps up with the latest in education, and is a patient person, is a compassionate person, hard worker, someone that values learning herself and continues her own education.

Knowledge was important for Rose's ideal teacher as well: "An ideal

teacher cares more about the students than about the subject matter, but at the same time, is knowledgeable and innovative in getting the subject matter across." She gave an example:

One of the best teachers I had was my honors science teacher in high school. She had a whole string of degrees and spent her summers doing research in nuclear biology. She died young with some form of cancer probably contracted during those summer research projects. She challenged us to think critically, to problem solve, to look beyond ourselves to the broader world and its problems.

Beth also remembered a favorite teacher and seems to identify her as an important mentor for prospective teachers:

There was one particular nun in high school. [I remember] her dedication and her joy in us learning little things. And I would look at her at times and I would say, "Why are you smiling?" And she said, "Because you understand" and I asked, "Why do you have to smile about that?" And she said, "You will know." That was all she would say. I guess with that I wanted to be like that; I wanted to know what she knows about teaching.

Another teacher-parent, Joan, talked about the value of balance and the importance of making learning fun:

I think an ideal teacher is a teacher who has it all together; she is fun, and she is organized, not like most teachers looking like she's got her head cut off, you know. She has control of the students without being overly strict. You know, kids want to be in the classroom because it's fun, and you can see the relaxation in their faces when they're in that classroom. That's a perfect teacher.

Each of these women placed high value on each individual student. These are teachers committed to a pedagogy of the learner-centered classroom. It would make sense that they would also affirm their own child's individuality and ability to make decisions.

The young adults in this study were well aware of the quality of teaching they were exposed to as children. Stephanie clearly identified her favorite type of teacher: "The hands-on teacher, the one who always had us involved in doing things and not just sitting there lecturing at us but actually getting to do things in the class and in the classroom." Christopher interpreted the question as an opportunity to remember a favorite teacher:

The ones that I did like? I don't know if it's more a specific person or a specific teacher or a certain type of teacher-personality that I liked. My economics teacher my senior year was a nice lady and you know she kind of connected real well with high school kids, I felt like. And my eighth grade teacher I liked a lot, even though he really got on me a couple of times; you know, I think I got paddled

by him a couple of times and everything, but I really liked him. He was funny and he was good with kids and I liked him a lot.

Like Stephanie, Christopher was unimpressed with a straight lecture and valued teaching that included more experiential learning :

My favorite type of teacher would be one who would be more involved in the activities that they're trying to teach rather than verbatim trying to talk you through it. Actually, a little demonstration, and show you exactly what they were expecting, if it was feasible. You know a math teacher is not going to be able to really do that. But I typically never had any problems with math because there was always only one answer. But someone who is a little bit more involved in the actual process of teaching versus just the words on paper.

Melanie's favorite teachers affirmed their students and in turn were respected for both their knowledge and their ability to interact with students.

When she was asked to describe her favorite kind of teacher, she highlighted:

Mutual respect. They could be nice. They would talk to you like a human being, not like you were just young and dumb. Good teachers cared what their students thought about things; bad teachers expected you to just sit there and be quiet.

These teachers' kids expected good teachers to care about the students,

to know about the subject, and to make learning enjoyable and challenging. The second interview question asked the participants to consider the positive aspects of their situation.

How was being a teacher's kid beneficial?

The research shifted slightly when the young adults were asked to remember when being a teacher's kid was beneficial for them. Stephanie saw benefits in the networking between her teacher-parent and her teachers:

I can remember times that it helped actually, because my mom knew people. She knew people as a teacher and they knew me as being a teacher's daughter, and so I think it kind of helped. I don't think they necessarily said, "Oh well, we'll go easy on her," or anything like that. But it was just good to know that my mom knew him or my mom knew her. I guess I tried to be on my best behavior, you know, more because my mom knew her, and I guess I worked hard because I wanted to show that I have the ability to do that; not necessarily for my mom, but you know just in a way so my mom or the person who knew my mom knew that I was a good kid.

Observing his mom grading papers gave Christopher an appreciation of the work teachers do:

One thing that we were able to see is like my mom bringing home papers and grading them. And sometimes I would sit and I would help her tally up scores. I think that it made me understand teachers really look at this stuff. You know seeing my mom up at nine or 10 o'clock at night going through at 11 o'clock, midnight, one in the morning sometimes, going through grading papers and stuff you know. It did make me realize that there're teachers that really are very serious about their job, and they stay up all hours of the night working on this stuff sometimes. I think it gave me an appreciation at least for that, you know, and knowing that there's a lot of hard work that goes into it. I did think that I recognized at an early age that my mom worked a lot harder than most people; she worked a lot of hours. She was bringing work home and spent a lot of time working on stuff at the house, grading papers, reports, all that kind of stuff. That helped me to really see that the work wasn't just for no reason, it was important. When I had assignments and stuff, I knew that the teachers were going to be at home looking at it and reading it. So I wanted to really try and apply myself some more to things.

Jessica and Melanie both could see the benefits of having a teacher parent for help with homework. Jessica said: "She had that background of knowing everything that I was learning, so if I needed help at all she was right

there. You know I've seen some parents that are flipping through the book trying to figure out what the heck their child is learning in school, and she just had that background." Melanie was appreciative of her mother's ability to help with assignments: "I had the best English grades ever: bibliography was always good, sentence structure was always good on reports. I was straight; I had the best proofreader ever."

For the participants in this study, being a teacher's kid was generally seen as beneficial; furthermore, the benefits of being a teacher's kid were sometimes tied up with proximity, and so that was the next interview question.

Were you ever in her class or in the same building?

Jessica remembered being in the same building where her mother was teaching:

There have been several times where she's worked like in a classroom down the hall in the same building. As a matter of fact, all through my elementary and middle school years she did. And it wasn't until we moved to Texas that she wasn't in the same building as me, so that was kind of weird. I was one of those kids who'd forget to bring home permission slips, and so I could like run to my mom and say, "Mom, sign this" or "Mom, I forgot lunch money" or "Mom, I need this" or what ever. So it was real nice and

like I said I rarely got in trouble, but if I did get in trouble, then she was right there.

The teacher-parents in this study were not always positive about being in the same building with their own children. Joan feels strongly that too much information is unnecessary:

One thing that I could not stand is, I knew everything that went on in their lives. If they dropped a pen and got in trouble for it, I would hear about it from the teacher. I think that of all the teachers that my kids had, there is only one who would always be positive, always wanted to say something positive about my kids, but most of them complained. If there was something that she was missing or what ever, it was like your daughter didn't do this -- da, da, da, da, da. You know, they would always try to tell me about my daughter even when I didn't want to hear about it; if I wasn't there I wouldn't have known, and if I didn't know, ignorance is bliss. And so I think I would be harder with them when they would come home because I knew what they got in trouble for right away. Whereas something that they may have done other parents would never have found out about, so I think that was kind of a negative: I just felt like it was unfair to them because I knew everything that was going on in their lives in school every single minute.

Rose remembered being called out of class and the impact her being in

the same building had on her and her children:

We were in the same building and my son, a fourth-grader, got into a scuffle on the playground. I was teaching eighth grade and the principal came over the intercom and asked me to come to the office. I gave my class something to do and went to the office, not knowing what the problem was. When I found out it was really a minor problem, I was furious. At the end of the day, I met with the principal and suggested that next time she should call my husband or talk to me after classes were over. If I hadn't been right there, I might not even have known about the fight, but instead not only did I know about it, so did my eighth grade class because I had to explain to them why I had been called to the principal's office.

Beth experienced the same difficulty being in the same building with her son:

I had to separate parent from teacher. I told the teachers of my son, "Do not tell him 'I will go down the hall and get your mother.'" I am not his mom right now, and unless you can do that to all of the other 21 students you have in there, don't do that. When the school is over, and it's 3:35, then come find me, just like any other parents and tell me that I have to talk to you, and then we will talk. I hate it when they do that. You have to learn how to separate the parent from the teacher. Sometimes it conflicts and you want to

jump in there, but you can't do that. Don't call me on my off period; no, you need to come see me after school just like any other parent. About this teacher/teacher relationship, my youngest one has a lot of special needs, and I say to his teachers, whatever you need, I will help you with that. And I discuss his progress because of his special needs. I want to stay positive with him, so whenever we are discussing education wise then I don't permit him to hear it.

Only two of my teacher-parent participants remembered having her child in her class; Ann remembered a third grade class:

It wasn't that easy, actually. He was an only child and he had to share my attention with other children, and it was a small class with a high percentage of special needs. There were only 13 kids and there were some children with some big problems, so we actually went to family therapy, my son and I, to help us, and he, I think, felt jealous of one boy in particular, so it was a little hard for him, and it was hard for me, too.

Ironically one of my young adults remembered being in her mother's class, even though her mother had not remembered that experience. Jessica remembered:

Yes, I was. In Chicago, she taught Spanish; it was a bilingual school, so if English was your first language, you had to take Spanish class and if Spanish was your first language, you had to

take English classes. And so it was English as our first language, and we were taking Spanish classes, and she was the Spanish teacher. So it was kind of funny because I knew -- like I was in first and second grade, so I'm really young and I have a young mind, and everyone knew she was my mom. And I tried to go in there with like trying not to be a brat because my mom might not be like I always have to be the volunteer and I always have to be the center of attention. I tried not to do that. But at the same time, my mom was trying to, like, make it so she wanted to still show me love, but she didn't want to always pick me. So we were trying to find, like, that middle balance. So it was kind of funny. But you know, I didn't get in trouble in her class or anything like that, but it was kind of funny because whenever she picked me I was like "She's picking me because I'm her daughter." So it wasn't a bad experience; it was just kind of funny, and it was an easy subject because, you know, they just try to work on teaching you more Spanish. And actually, I'm horrible in Spanish, so she was always like trying to get me to talk more.

Sue remembered being in the same building with two of her sons, and generally knowing how they were doing. It was interesting that they responded differently to having her in the building.

They might have been frustrated some because we had avenues of knowing what was going on, just by being a teacher and understanding the system; they might have been able to get away with a little more than they were able to because I was there. Just in, you know, minor ways, they might have been able to kind of skirt the issues of homework or grades that weren't quite so good. We were able to deal with that. The younger one had problems with my being in the high school when he was there. He was embarrassed to know that he had a mother -- all of his class knew he had a mother, and that was rare, so he would try to pretend that he didn't know me. The older one, on the other hand, just loved it. He'd come bouncing down the hall, and holler "Hey, Mom" and come over and give me a kiss at the door when I was standing there, and then bounce on off. It didn't bother him at all.

Joan recognized that the problem with having your own in your class is maintaining a balance:

I was teaching my son in first grade, and it was very difficult because I wanted him to be the model student, and he was not. So, it made it really difficult to be a parent and a teacher in that environment. I think at home, if you are a home-schooling teacher -- you know, if you're home-schooling your kids -- it's a little different, I think, then if you are in the school. When you're in the

school situation, because you've got all the other kids to worry about, you don't want to be unfair to the other kids.

Jessica commented on times when she and her mother were in the same building: "I think her being there kind of made it so that I knew that I couldn't get away with too much. And if there were instances where I might have gotten into trouble, it kind of made me think twice."

Marge made a quick comment about sharing classroom space with her daughter's class and about home-schooling as well:

No, they were never in my class, although once in middle school we had a classroom where two classes shared the same room and my daughter was in one half of the room and I taught in the other half. And then my son had his locker right outside my classroom door. I would not advise it; I would not want to be teaching my own kids. I don't think I could have ever handled home schooling; I probably would have killed all of them.

Timothy was in the same building with his mother and also recognized, from the early grades on, that his behavior and academic achievements reflected on his mother: "My mother's expectations were always too high, due mostly, I think, from being afraid of what her peers in the school would think if I did poorly."

Jeremy found that his mother didn't have to be in the same building to be easily accessible. When asked if his mother's profession was ever a problem for him, he replied:

I guess I would say yes, but only when I got in trouble because the principal had the teachers' directory and was able to get a hold of my mom ASAP. More than once, but one time in particular, that was in high school. But, yeah, within 30 minutes my mom was up at the high school, and I was in a whole lot of trouble. And they knew each other -- it was the clique, you know, the principal and my mom being in the district for so long. That's the problem, intermingling with other teachers, so you always had someone watching your back, whether you liked it or not. So yeah, there were always eyes -- or flies on the wall, if you want to say, that were kind of troublesome somewhat, but also good. It kept you out of trouble and on the straight and narrow while you were in school. You know, you're in school to go to school and try to learn something.

Jeremy continued his reflection on his experiences in his school district after having been away for a year or two because of his father's military career:

Coming back, having, you know, having a large family and a number of them going to the same school district and everybody knowing all the kid's, I would hear "You should have known better

than that” or “Your brothers and sisters weren’t that way,” and
 “Your mom didn’t raise you that way. What the hell are you
 doing?” So, yeah, good and bad.

The emphasis changed when I asked the participants to think about their home life during those school years.

Was your house different from someone else’s house who didn’t have a teacher-parent?

The purpose of this question was to clarify whether the participants thought of themselves and their family life as somehow not “normal.” I asked each of the participants if there was anything different about their house compared to households where there wasn’t a teacher-parent. Predictably, most of the teacher-parents didn’t think there were a lot of differences, and the young adults remembered major differences. Lynn was specific about homework:

I don’t know that it was because I was a teacher that this happened, I knew that this happened in households where there weren’t teachers -- but for homework and schoolwork, there was a designated time. I would, at times during the kids’ life, depending on the grade they were in and how old they were, let them make a decision about whether or not it would have been right after school, whether they wanted a break and do homework right after dinner.

But if that didn't seem to work out, then I would change the time. I always asked how their day was when they walked in the door. I always made them empty their book bags and show me what was in there. I always wanted to know when I could be involved in going to school. Even in high school, I remember it was very hard because I did not get papers coming home, and so they would have to remember when open houses were, or when this was, where that was, because there were no papers, and they didn't have a web site at that point. So it wasn't always easy to know when things were going on at school, and I always went to everything that went on at school. My husband would go, if he was in the area, but being in the military, he didn't always get there. He wasn't dedicated to school; school was not his bag, and he was not raised in an environment where school was important or even mattered. And so it really kind of -- he didn't get it. You know "Why do we have to go? I'm tired and I want to stay home." That kind of thing. But anyway, I encouraged the kids -- I would help them with their homework; they weren't always real receptive to my help, so I would encourage even calling a friend or those kinds of things just to get the work done. Again, I suspect those kinds of things happened in homes where parents weren't teachers; I know that those were the things that I insisted upon in our home.

Joan added another way that her children were encouraged to learn because she also saw that the toys that a child has can be important in shaping the love of learning:

I think I tried to -- because I focused on school -- I tried to have more toys and games that were more educational. I tried to bring the things that were a learning experience, and I tried to bring books that my kids could read and enjoy. So, that's one thing that I tried to do, you know, for my house. It's like when I give away gifts for my grandson, I always try to get him something that's educational. The longer I'm in school, the more I learn and the more I learn about how kids learn, the more I focus on putting learning in their environment. If I can put learning in the environment, my kids will be good at school, so they can succeed in school. We try to have all of these items available: books and games. I try to do that for my kids so that they can -- to make learning easier for them at school.

Melanie laughed about one aspect of her home life that she didn't see as much of in her friends' homes: "Every thing was a 'learning experience.' Whatever happened, mom would say 'You should learn something from that.' And I'd say, 'O.K. I'll try.' I didn't see that so much with my friends' families."

Asked if her house were different, Marge replied:

I think in some ways: the emphasis on studying, the emphasis on doing homework, the emphasis on turning off the TV, I think all that played a big role. My husband also has a Masters in education, so I think it was coming from both sides, it wasn't just from me. I can't say it always worked (laughing), but I think we really saw a need for a, you know, having to learn.

Beth and her son both remembered a house full of her children's friends:

My house is full of children, all the time. When I had him and his sister, one weekend was his and one weekend was hers. I always had kids in my house. It has actually calmed down a little bit, but I still have a 13-year-old, so it's only calmed down because he doesn't go to the district school, he goes to one school and I go to another. The kids in his class can't just walk down the street to our home.

Her son later commented on the same thing:

She is a middle school teacher, and they do a lot of things with children; my house was different because that was the house they'd hang out at; all my friends came over. Everybody came over video game night when I was young. There was never a time when there were no kids in our house. Kids in school; kids everywhere.

Jessica recognized the help her mother could give with schoolwork and

admired the respect some of her friends gave her mother as a valued resource for learning:

She knew what we were learning, so it was easy to go up to her. And a lot of my friends if they ever had a problem like in Spanish, like if they had questions, then they'd come over and they'd ask my mom. She always had great study guides. And whenever I had a test, and I said "Mom I'm having a hard time reviewing this," she would come up with all these little clues and whatnot. She was real good at tutoring. I don't know if other parents put too much pressure on schooling, but I liked school. If I had hated school or my mom was trying to push me, it would probably be something different.

Stephanie remembered differences within her own home and ascribed those differences to differences in attitudes about school -- and especially homework -- she and her brother exhibited:

I would always do my homework pretty much. It wasn't a big deal for me; I did it. I came home, did my homework and you know sometimes I waited to the last minute to do it, but I did it. It was on me, basically. But I can remember fights that my mother had with my brother about getting his homework done and that type of thing. I do remember other households that the parents wouldn't even care that their kids did their homework, you know. It was kind of

like "It's on you; it's your homework; you do it or you don't do it and whatever." With me it was kind of that way because I usually did mine and didn't have to worry about it. And growing up, now that I have my own child now, and then learning different parenting strategies [that say] "it's on your child." So in a way I think it really depends on the child; I really do. I think making my brother get his homework done before he could watch TV or before he could go out with friends was good for my brother because he probably wouldn't have gotten it done and he probably wouldn't have gotten as much stuff as he did get done. But at the same time, I think it was good for me to let it be on my shoulders. Homework was one of the responsibilities that I needed to get done, and if I procrastinated, you know, it was my own fault. So, in a way I think it just depends on your child, and you've got to know your own kid.

Christopher used this question to comment on parenting style. When asked if things were different in his house from other homes he responded:

Yes. I don't know if it was because my mom was a teacher or just because my parents, you know, were strict. Compared to other parents, parents of the friends that I hung out with, my parents were the most strict out of all my friends -- my group of friends. Maybe it had to do with the fact that my mom was a teacher, some of that, I think, it was just that my parents were very conservative

growing up, too, and they were very strict, you know, when we were kids. But I would say when it came to school, you know, we would have to take progress reports to school, to all of our teachers, even before the schools were doing progress reports. My mom would write one out like every three weeks, and we would take it into school and have each teacher, you know, initial off on it in with their comments next to their name and their classes as to how I was doing. So I think that was probably something that they did more because my mom was a teacher, so she did those kinds of things. And I think maybe grade wise, I got on restriction if I brought home anything below an 80. I mean it had to be an 80 or better; C's were unacceptable for me. So, if I had any classes that I got a 79 or 78, I mean, it was restriction.

Christopher continued his reflection on a more positive note:

But, in the same respect, you know, there were boundaries, and you knew what your boundaries were. I mean it wasn't like it was totally unfair, you know. My parents were pretty clear about things. We just chose to break the rules sometimes. I mean it wasn't like we didn't know what the expectations were, I will say that. My parents were pretty clear; especially my mom was very clear about expectations. You know my mom was a list maker. She would write things down. You could sit down and she would say this is

what you can do, this is what you can't do. This is what the punishment will be if this happens. So she was clear about things. I think for the most part, you know, as a parent now myself, a lot of the things that my mom did make sense to me. But, as a kid, I can tell you from -- I think that's what you're asking is more from what my perspective was as a kid in the house -- I will tell you that there were times when I felt like things were a little unfair. I felt like there were times when maybe we were treated unfairly because of the fact that my mom was a teacher. You know, maybe that she had access to get information that maybe other parents couldn't get. If I was late to a class one minute, she could find out about it in the teacher's lounge or from the teacher as opposed to, you know, other kids' parents didn't run into the teacher and they wouldn't take the time to notify a parent over something small like that.

Whereas Christopher equated "conservative" with "strict," Ann described her home as "liberal," and both valued learning:

Well, I think we were a more liberal household, and also a household that really valued learning and reading. And that wasn't true of his classmates in general. I mean there were some, but we were different. He definitely picked up some political stuff. He is as interested in that as his father is. He had friends from his class who came over and he went to their houses also, but it was more

coming to our house. There was one classmate in particular that we couldn't let him go to because of a gun situation. The father kept a gun that wasn't locked up, and it was hard to explain to our son when he was so young why he couldn't go there anymore.

Rose remembered her home as sometimes being a library: "There were always a lot of books in our house; we had encyclopedias that other kids would come over to borrow. We could usually help anybody with homework, and I tried to make sure it was done, but I just assumed everyone else was doing the same thing."

It seems from these responses that much of what was valued in school was also important at home. Whether this lack of separation was problematic for the young adult's as children is really not clear. The fact that the teacher-parents expected other parents to oversee homework, and that they believed that most children were getting that kind of academic support, is not consistent with what their children saw among their friends.

Did you/your parent talk to your teachers as a parent or as a fellow teacher?

In an effort to discover if there was a perceptible overlap of their two roles for the teacher-parent, I asked each participant in both groups how communication with other teachers usually proceeded, especially in parent-teacher conferences. Stephanie responded that, in her presence:

I think she talked to them as a parent. Because I can remember going to open houses -- and this is more a junior high and high school -- but I can remember her talking to them mostly as a parent: "How is my daughter doing?" You know, that type of thing. I don't think a whole bunch knew she was a teacher. I know some did, but a whole bunch didn't, and they may have asked her how she was doing or she may have asked them how they were doing but other than that, it was strictly, you know, how is my daughter doing in your class and that type of thing. And so she talked to them more as a parent than as a teacher.

Jessica remembered the same kind of support and especially during a difficult time early in her schooling:

If there was a concern -- like I remember when I was in first grade and there was a teacher I had and I thought she was very strict. So I came home and told my mom that I was afraid to raise my hand. I get real nervous if I have someone yelling kind of. She had a real strong voice. So, as a parent, she moved me to the other classroom where I stayed for half a year. The other teacher taught at a slower pace or something like that. But I know that after the semester we talked about it, and she transferred me back because the teacher who worked at a faster pace, I think, also worked at a higher level. And so I went back in there knowing that

I was smart enough not to need the classroom with the other teacher, and I could work with the one I'd been afraid of. So her persona, I guess to me, and changed, because now I felt like I was up to the challenge. And I think that if my mom hadn't gone in there as a parent and if she would have just said, "You need to stick it out to because these are fellow colleagues," or whatever, I might have gone through the whole year scared of this teacher and then not been able to learn and I would still have been afraid. But she went in, I felt as a parent and she voiced my concerns and she was there for me as a parent, as a mom.

Raphael sympathized with everyone, the teacher-parents and the children's teachers, as he remembered those conversations:

When a teacher talks to a teacher and you know they have a problem with the kid, that causes a lot of problems. They talk a lot about teacher to teacher and not teacher to parent. The parent's side comes out when the teacher says something about her son that was insulting; that's when the parent's side comes out.

Jeremy's first response had to do with whose side his mother was on during a conference:

Oh, she was definitely on the teacher's side of things every time. Because, you know, coming from a large family it made us understand at an early age that in large groups it's hard for an

individual to keep control of everybody, so acting up in class wasn't accepted at all. So if it was something like that -- every time she was on the teacher's side, for sure. You are at school to do one thing: do what the teacher says and participate in class. And if you're not participating in a positive manner then you're not schooling.

When pressed to discuss whether his mother spoke to teachers as a parent or as a fellow teacher, he set forth some conditions:

I would say that it would depend on the situation. You know, if it was about the education side of things, it was definitely as the parent; if it was on the discipline side of things, then it was definitely with a strong hand of whether it was the parent or teacher because the majority of my teachers were parents themselves. So I would say that if it was, you know, for me to learn and for me to be on task, then it was definitely as a parent. But if it was I needed to, you know, sit up straight, and not sleep in class, and stay on task in that manner, then it was definitely on the teacher's side of things. So, a little mixed love there.

The young adults not only recognized when their teacher-parent was playing one role or the other, but also felt that their teacher-parent differentiated those roles appropriately. The teacher-parents were less assured that they had sorted out when to be a parent and when to be a teacher.

Marge voiced the difficulty most teacher-parents faced when trying to maintain the appropriate balance between their roles of parent and fellow teacher.

I kind of think my conversation with other teachers was a combination of both. You know the parent's side but you also know the teacher's side. I think being a teacher helped you see where the teacher was coming from and then knowing your child, you knew what strings your child was pulling. So I think it was usually a balance of the two.

Joan also recognized the precarious nature of discussions with colleagues who happened to be your children's teachers. When asked whether she spoke to their teachers mostly as a parent or as a fellow teacher, she explained:

I think, both. I think when they would talk to me, and it was more as a colleague. I think mostly as a teacher, they would tell me things and I would take it as if they were talking about another child. And, you know, like the way you talk about "Johnny did this" and "Johnny did that." So, I would take it more that way, and then I would kind of talk about what I thought my child needed. "Well, maybe they need this," and tried to give them some feedback -- since I knew them personally -- as to how to improve communication with my child. I think at school I was the educator.

I had that educator role, and so I didn't want to take it as a parent, you know, where I'm going to be assertive and say things like "my child is right" because, being a teacher, I know how manipulative kids can be. So I never gave -- I never quite gave my kids total favor, I never said "it's not his fault" kind of thing. Because as an educator I know what it's like to deal with students, and mine are no different.

Lynn's specialization in early childhood education made it easier for her to distance herself from her teacher role when she was talking with her children's junior high and high school teachers. When asked, "Did you generally speak to the teachers as a parent or as a fellow teacher?" she explained:

As a parent. First of all, when my kids were younger, I didn't have the four year degree, and so I didn't pretend to know the level that they knew about child development or anything else. And when they got older, again I spoke to the teachers as a parent because what the teachers were doing and what they were teaching, and the age that they were dealing with was not my forte. Early childhood is what I went into. Early childhood was my specialization, it was my love, and I felt like I was an expert at that. I didn't necessarily feel that I was an expert at all the other levels, and the special departmentalized courses, or anything else. And so I spoke to them as a parent. And my main concern was "How is

my child doing?" And "Is there anything I can do to help?" And "Is there anything that we can do, that you can see that needs to be done, that we need to do?" But it was always from a parent point of view. I never introduced myself as "Hi, I'm Mrs. ____, and I teach at ____." They may have found it out in the course of conversation, and I wouldn't have hesitated to say that, but I've never introduced myself that way. By the time they were in junior high or high school, I introduced myself by using my child's name when I met the teachers: "Hi, I'm ____'s mom."

Rose also mentioned the difficulty sometimes evident in those first introductory meetings:

I never introduced myself first as a teacher. Often we were new to a district, and that first open house or parent-teacher conference was truly a meeting between strangers. I respected the teacher's right to tell me how she thought my child was doing in her class. On the other hand, if there was a problem, I was able to step in as a teacher and say this is what they were doing before we left the last school or this is the reading book they passed last year, and if, at that point, my being a teacher added credibility to what I had to say, I would bring it up. I was never the type of parent who claimed "My child would never do that" because as a teacher, I knew that even good kids can get caught up in peer pressure. And

right after a move, kids can be pretty stressed, so I needed to hear what this “stranger” had to say about how my child was coping with a new school. I guess I tried to be a teacher when I needed to be and a parent all the time. Once I got to know the teachers, or if I started teaching in the district or in the school, then some of those teachers became my friends and our conversations were much less formal, but I still tried to maintain the parent role when it came to discussing my children.

Summary of Research Question #1

This first research question and the attendant interview questions revealed perceived advantages and disadvantages of being a teacher’s kid. The young adults and their teacher-parents all recognized that having help with homework was an obvious advantage for teacher’s kids. The teacher-parents were also self-assured in their knowledge of their child’s level of achievement, especially when moving from district to district, state to state, or in and out of Department of Defense schools overseas. The teacher-parents saw this as an important responsibility. The young adults also remembered help with homework, and, on a lighter note, they remembered a ride to school and

guaranteed lunch money as particular benefits of having mom teaching in the same building.

But everything was not positive. There is a distinct disadvantage to being a teacher's kid. I have called this disadvantage a sense of exposure. Anderson called the same reality "visibility" in her study of preachers' kids. (Anderson, 404) Both young adults and teacher-parents talked of "knowing everything" that was going on in the students' lives. There were very few secrets, academically or behaviorally. This was sometimes a burden for the parents as well as for the student. Although some of the young adults spoke of the constant pressure to behave appropriately because "somebody" would see and probably "tell my mom," the teacher-parents were not thrilled about always hearing about every little transgression either, especially if it was delivered with a "your-kid's-not-perfect" sneer. The young adults remembered often feeling added pressure to behave because they didn't want their actions to embarrass their teacher-parents. Some young adults recalled added pressure to achieve academically for the same reason. It would seem from this research that there are added pressures imposed on teacher's kids and their parents.

Research Question #2: How Has Their Family Shaped Their Understanding of Education and Their Attitudes Toward It?

The second key question for this study asked how having a teacher-parent had shaped the young adult's attitudes toward education. This question elicited a range of responses.

Stephanie was very positive:

I think it helped me to enjoy school, in a way, you know. I really did, I liked school even at the college. And I attribute some of that to being -- to mom being a teacher or mom understanding kind of the developmental ability of each student. Whereas I know some parents who don't understand that. Because she is a teacher and because she's gone through [studied], you know, all that, she understands the developmental abilities and where a child should be at, and that some children are different, you know, and not all kids are the same. So she didn't compare kids or compare my brother to me or anything like that. And so I think that helped me enjoy school, and so I tried to do the best I could in school.

This young woman is now raising her own children and has been working at her son's childcare center.

And I'm doing that for my son the last couple of years, and I think it was a great experience for him. You try to do what your parents

did really well. You try to do the best for your child, and any mistakes your parents made, you try to bring yourself around so you don't make the same mistakes. And I think that was one of the benefits of her being there, just showing that comfort. And so I know my relationship with my son is very close already, but I think it's closer, too, because we had that bond of we went to school together, and we came home and worked together. So I had a great sense of that too, so I like to pass it on to my children.

Joan values her profession and the impact it has had on her children. Her continuing education, like several of my participants' repeated returns to a classroom as a student, had a deliberate intention of setting an example for her children.

I think it did give them a positive attitude. Even my son right now -- after high school, that was it. I think because I was in school, it helped him finish high school because our background is, nobody graduates. And I knew that it was important for him to have a high school diploma, so I pushed him, and he knew that it was important to me, so he pushed himself. Otherwise I think he would have been a dropout, but I think that my being a teacher helped him. And my daughter stumbled a bit here and there, but she was geared towards going to school. I think with them, it's like in every situation, is just not knowing what you're going to do, where you're

going from there. But I think because I was an educator, they knew that they were not going to give up, they were going to go somewhere with it, you know and I think that that's what it was. Especially with minorities because, you know, minorities to go to school it's like unusual, especially in my family. Out of all my brothers, my sister [a teacher] was the only one that went off to college. And out of all my nieces and nephews, we set the example for them. Some of them have tried to further their education, but I think my sister was the one that started the wheel rolling with the family going to higher education.

Lynn saw a love of learning in her daughter and believed that fostering that attribute would eventually prove beneficial for her daughter:

I think that she was focused on learning; I just don't know whether that was because I was a teacher. I guess I could find out more from her whether my being a teacher shaped this or not, I don't know. I think perhaps there is a little bit of embarrassment whether or not "my mom would find out," so maybe. But she was self-motivated; that was not from me. It was just her drive. She was always competitive; she always wanted to be the center of attention, and I think that with me she knew that one way to do that or one way to get that was to excel in school. Right or wrong, I don't know, but it was just something that I insisted on. You know

it was just what I wanted for them. I wanted them to do well in school for themselves, and I suppose I was proud full of them as well for that. But, you know, I wanted that excelling and everything that kind of goes with it: getting into a college, being able to choose your field, and excelling in a job in the future that all kind of goes with, I felt like, doing well in school. So I encouraged, and I participated as much as I could. Even though I was a teacher, for the younger days when they were in school, I only worked in the mornings because I was a pre-K teacher. And so I was still part of their school life, because I could go in the afternoon to do things in their classrooms and be a volunteer in the classroom, so the combination of being able to do those things I enjoyed, I thought it was great. And I liked my job because of that. As they got older, I was involved in their after school activities, and being a teacher allowed me to do that too because, you know, the hours were such that I could do that. And all of that was really important to me for them.

Jeremy views education as much more encompassing than school work. When asked if being a teacher's kid shaped his attitude about school and education, he replied:

I would say, no -- I mean, yes, in that sense that I had to get through high school. But I learned early -- in a large family -- that

work was work whether it's book work or whether it's manual labor, it's still cumbersome, it's trouble, and it's hard work. I mean, you had to do what you needed to do to take you forward. And you know I knew the history of my grandparents not going to school. You know, my mom and my dad were college-educated, but I don't know if any of my dad's siblings even graduated from university. On my mom's side of the family is a little more educated, but my father's side of the family, everybody was blue-collar, everybody worked in the factory. So education is about learning, and, I think, you know, you can learn a lot of things from the world that you would never learn in school. I mean, you can only read so many words and there are a lot of people that are book smart who don't have a clue when you get them outside of their element. So, education is what you make of it; I think it depends on what you're looking to be educated on. You know, are you looking to learn about Shakespeare, or are you looking to dive into literature, or are you word savvy, is that what you like? I think sometimes I thought school was more forcing you, and it wasn't enjoyable for me. I don't see education as being something you learn in school, you know. Education is being able to communicate with people, being able to deal with the day-to-day things, then it doesn't matter how smart you are.

Christopher's reflection on his attitudes toward education took him back to fifth grade and a newly-blended family and different expectations.

And that was when I started fifth grade, and so, all of a sudden, it was like -- I loved school before, because it was never an issue. It was never a problem. There were never any guidelines or restrictions, and I just have the kind of personality that I'll go out there where something, I liked it, I enjoy doing things, until you make it work. And then, once it becomes clear that now there are expectations and this and that, I withdraw, and I have a hard time sometimes with that -- especially as a kid; not so much as an adult anymore -- but as a kid I had a lot of hard time with that. You know, I wouldn't have minded going out and mowing the lawn until my parents told me: "If you don't go mow the lawn, you'll be on restriction for a week." Then it was like, "Now, I don't want to mow the lawn," you know? Well, to make a long story short, that was kind of my take on it. When my dad married my mom things were different all of a sudden. We never had rules about school. There were no restrictions. It was just: "Hey, do the best you can." And I was in TAG, you know, starting in the third grade, and I took AP classes all the way out through the time I graduated. I was a smart kid. There's no reason I shouldn't have gone to college. I was into music, and I could have gotten some scholarships or something.

But it's just that starting in fifth grade that was when it was like:

“Well, now this is how it's going to be. I'm a teacher and I believe school is important, it is going to be restrictions if you do this, if you do that, if you don't get . . .” – and that's when I started getting bad grades -- not bad, but I mean, that's when I started getting C's.

And for the rest of my school years, the comment always made by teachers to my parents and my parents to me was that I just wasn't applying myself. And I think that's the thing. I think I got sort of disinterested; I allowed myself to get disinterested because all of a sudden it was like: Whoa, you know, this isn't, like, fun anymore. It became, like, there were consequences and all these things. And so I will tell you that, to be totally honest with you, when I graduated high school, I wanted to get as far away from school as I possibly could and that's what I did.

Raphael was more succinct, but equally honest about his perception of his parents' expectations:

It was a positive attitude about education, even though I didn't really do anything with it. Our parents were very good parents, but I don't know what happened throughout their lifetime, but I was not in a situation, in where I had the opportunity, you know a college fund or something like that. I don't know how that is going to work, but I want my son to know that if he has [a college fund], he would

be more motivated to at least take pre-college classes. College costs money; I didn't have the brains to really get grants or something like that. I was different from my sister; she studied for tests and things like that, me no. I turned in just enough homework to pass the class; it was hard on my parents because they wanted me to go to college and be successful. I was the kind of kid that if you told me something was hot, I wouldn't believe it unless I touched it. The people I hung out with, college and money was the stuff they didn't have to think about.

Beth summed up her role in shaping her children's attitudes about education and then leaving the decision in each child's hands:

I can only try. I can only hope that they understand that education is important. With my daughter, we pay for whatever courses she wants to take. You want to take two courses, then we pay for two courses, but it's whatever they want to do. It's up to them; it's their decision. I try to support whatever they want to do. I offer them choices, but I can't do it for them. I hope, whatever the bumps and bruises, eventually they're going to figure it out: education is important. Now, you have to want it; I'm going to leave it up to their time. Not all kids are ready at the time you want them to be ready. Why force something they are not ready for? Eventually

they will be ready for it, and when they come to you and say I'm ready, you will say yes.

Sue was a little bit wistful in her recollections about shaping educational attitudes:

I wish that there was a way [to know] -- what I could have done that would have encouraged them or pulled more excellence from them. You do the best you can at the time, and set some standards, and hope that they are fair and reasonable, that meet some of your expectations, but still allow the children, you know, theirs, so that they didn't rebel against school or hate you. But, yet, you're preparing them and trying to teach them the value of -- even if it wasn't the value of *what* they were learning -- the value of learning. The value of being responsible, of having a work ethic, doing things you don't always want to do, because those types of values carry over as adults. But, anyhow, it's done. You can't relive it. There are a lot of things I'd love to have done differently for them. But they're good kids; they turned out nice. They might have been able to turn out better, but I'm not complaining. I'm proud. And they are happy. That's an important thing to me, that they seem to be happy. I think they're happy with who they are.

Rose specifically remembered travel opportunities which were important learning experiences for her children beyond the classroom:

There were times when I actually told my kids that not all learning happens in a classroom. When we had a chance to go to Rome during the school year, I took them out of school and traveled with my parents and my youngest brother. When we were between military assignments, I took them out of school during October and we traveled in New England, visiting family, and Stockbridge and the Norman Rockwell Museum, and New York City, and Old Sturbridge Village. We went skiing and had a week of ski lessons in the Alps in February when our youngest was six. I really believe that those opportunities trumped the classroom.

Marge saw a similar attitude with her son and his need to carry learning into the real world beyond the classroom:

I don't think he was serious about school; I think lots of times he was more interested in sports than in learning anything in school. Not that he ever failed anything, you know, but he certainly wasn't on the honor roll, and because he was a good athlete, he was approached with a partial scholarship, and that was kind of dangled in front of him, so he went. He enjoyed it, but he enjoyed [his sport] more, and so he finished that year and his grades were okay, I mean they weren't wonderful, they were okay, but his heart really wasn't in it. He left there and went to a community college for six months and dropped out, and his education has been more

traveling and seeing the world. His learning is through people rather than from a book. He was not a big reader, which the other kids were, and I think that was a detriment for him, too.

Summary of Research Question #2

The responses to the questions related to the second research question show me that these teacher-parents have instilled in their children a respect for learning that extends beyond the basic cause and effect societal perception, namely, “get a degree to get a better job.” I think it is significant that each of these teacher-parents extended her own education while her children were in school: some completed four-year degrees and certified, some earned master’s degrees and moved into administrative positions, some earned special certifications, but all continued to grow as educators. Each of these teacher-parents expected that her children would eventually figure out that learning is important, and each of them concluded that education was a choice for each young adult to make if and when he or she reached that point.

The young adults in this study recognize some level of missed opportunity, but they still value education, and they value their own choices. Their memories of the months surrounding their post high school education choices are at the heart of this study. The third research question was explicit.

**Research Question #3: How Did They Choose Not to Pursue or
Complete a College Degree Right Out of High School, and What
Meaning Do They Give to This Decision?**

In some ways, this is the key question of this study. It certainly is the question that sustained my determination to do this study, and it may have been the question that motivated some of my participants to be involved with this study. It became clear that the study needed to include the teacher-parents' recollections of this important time in their young adult's life as well, so the final research question focused on those responses.

**Research Question #4: What Is or Was the Teacher-Parent's
Response to This Decision?**

For ease of comparison, I have chosen to report each teacher-parent's recollection of this decision immediately following the young adult's. In the interest of better disguising the identity of participants, I do not identify the parents at all.

Jeremy has had some time to think about his decision to leave college, and his parents' reaction to that decision.

That would have been sophomore year, and I just didn't like where I was. I didn't like school. College calculus wasn't the easiest thing -- yeah, it was a really tough semester. And then it was the year of the World Cup in Italy, and I had a friend who landed a job working for Univision, the Spanish channel. And then when that deal was done, he said, "Hey, why don't you come over to Europe?" And that was the end of college. I went to Europe and never went back. I ended up moving to California and living in Lake Tahoe and just kind of traveling. I really got hooked on traveling. Once I went to Europe, I was all over the place, and ended up taking trans-Siberia into Mongolia and into China, and spent time in China and Thailand and did a lot of traveling. And I haven't stopped. You know, I'm more interested in people than I am really in the -- I hate to say it -- then in the past. You can learn from the past, but it's better to learn from somebody who sits right across from you at the time. And I'm not the best reader. I mean, I don't have a problem sitting down to read, but typically only if it's for enjoyment. It's like if I'm on vacation, or if I'm on a plane, or if I'm really restricted in what I'm doing, I'll read. If I had the option to do something, I'm not going to sit down and read something. If I can go mountain biking, or go swimming, or go waterskiing or, you know, something of that nature. Now, if it is either laundry or read,

well, I'm definitely going to be reading. Or cleaning or reading, then maybe I'll try to read a little something. But I've never really been one to sit -- I've always been on the move I would say.

I asked him how his parents handled this choice to leave school.

Oh, they cried. They cried. Well, they actually kind of forced me to go to college in the first place. I graduated on Friday and was going to college on Monday morning at eight o'clock. My dad forged my signature and sent me to university to get me out of town which was probably a good thing, but I didn't like it. I wasn't focused on really what I was going to school for. I didn't know why I was there, really. I was just kind of there because I wasn't wanted in this town. They were like: get out of town. So, yeah, but once they realized I wasn't going back -- you know, to this day -- they still sometimes ask if I'm ever going to go back. But I see no need. I really don't. I don't think I ever will go back, I'll probably be the only one without a degree. But you know, one of the most successful guys in my dad's family dropped out of school in 10th grade because they wouldn't let him play baseball. And he went straight into the factory. And he's a multimillionaire now. So how you apply yourself with what you know is important -- not what you know. Yeah. But they did cry. They were very upset. When I decided I was going to Europe, they knew I wasn't going to go

back to college they were upset -- especially my mother, especially my mom.

Somehow, with Jeremy's mom, the interview questions shifted so that the question that was asked was "Do you feel guilty that he doesn't have a degree?" Her response also included the possibility of an undiagnosed learning disorder.

No, no not really. My husband and I talked about this, and every one of them had the opportunity to go to college. With each one of them, one thing we did do is make each of them take out a student loan for their first year of school, so that if they screwed up, you know, it was on them. They had to pay for that first semester just to say this is serious business. You know we would like you to go to school and all that if that's what you want, but no, not at all; I don't think my son feels guilty. I think, I just don't think he was ready. And looking back I think years ago he was missed and had never been diagnosed, but I think he was borderline dyslexic. You know, just little things you know now: not interested in reading and handwriting. But back then he bluffed his way through, and he passed everything. But now looking back on it, I wouldn't be surprised if he was dyslexic. And yet, of all our kids, he could do anything with his hands -- anything. He can fix anything, do anything mechanical, and he can talk to anyone. He's Mister Personality, you know, he could probably run for public office. But

no I really don't feel guilty and I don't think he feels bad, and it -- when I think of a lot of the kids and their Masters degree's and his one brother has two Masters, but I don't think he regretted leaving college. I think he knows he had a chance and maybe if we had said "No, there's no way you're going to college if your grades aren't good enough," I think then he would have been upset. "Why can they go and I can't go?" But we never said anything like that. It will be interesting to see what he says about it, you know, but I don't think college was his thing. He has more friends, I think, than any of our kids; he has never met a stranger; he is one of those types, you know, he talks to everyone at Wal-Mart and he talks to all the old people and everybody loves him (laughing).

These two narratives are most closely parallel in the recognition of how reading affects formal education. Jeremy remembers "I'm not the best reader" and "I've never really been one to sit – I've always been on the move, I would say." His mother suggested: "I think years ago he was missed and had never been diagnosed, but I think he was borderline dyslexic," "not interested in reading," "And yet, he could do anything with his hands – anything." Both are content with the choice Jeremy has made. Jeremy said: "I see no need. I really don't. I don't think I ever will go back," and his mother concurs "I don't think he feels bad [...] I don't think college was his thing."

Jessica's response to this question was somewhat self-deprecating at first:

Well, I have always been kind of naïve and a little bit just not responsible for my age, so when I got out of high school, I was not babied, but I was definitely in the comfort of my own home. And so to have this responsibility of going to class whenever I wanted and picking out my own classes and I was 18 and I didn't know where I wanted to go, and I didn't have any idea what I was going to do. I was even debating joining the military at one point. So I went to college, and I was just not too focused at all. And then, you know, real quick my mom was like: "Whoa, you're coming home with D's. This is not going to fly."

And then I got married a year after high school, and I got pregnant right after I got married. And so my focus shifted, and I was more into the family life. But once I had my own son, I just knew that I didn't -- there are too many instances where people had children and they were housewives all their lives and something didn't go right, and they were stuck with out anything. And I didn't want to do that. So I wanted to go back to school. Then when I was getting a divorce and I moved back here, I wanted to go to school but it was definitely more obstacles I had to overcome. And so now it's just been kind of a slow process. But this year you know

I'm taking a year off, and so I'm back on that goal and I have my second son and very focused and I have the support of my new husband and I of course have the support of my family so I'm excited about going back to school and doing it again and trying to finish up. Because each step I take, I know I'm closer to that goal.

Jessica's mom feels certain that her daughter's formal education is not over, but this confidence has come after a series of starts and stops.

When I got out of high school I went straight to college. I went to school for 2, 3 years. I had a boyfriend. You know, got frustrated - - my boyfriend and I broke up, I got frustrated with school, got frustrated with the whole situation, and dropped out. I went to work with no intentions of going back to school, at least not for a while. And then I met my husband, I got married and I had my kids, and then I went back to school because financially, I wanted to be able to support myself, you know, in case my marriage didn't work. But mostly I went back to school because I wanted to set an example for my kids. If I was a college dropout, I wasn't going to be a good example. So I went back to school for that.

I kind of saw the same thing with my daughter. In fact, I told her, because I know her -- I try to see my daughter for who she is. And I knew that she was kind of the type of person that was passive. If she got a B in a class, she wouldn't strive for an A. You know,

she's very smart, but I think if she had pushed herself, she would have been up there. But she just kept herself pretty much level with B's and C's -- tried not to get too many C's, but they were there. So I told her one time, 'If you want to give yourself a break for one year after high school -- because I thought maybe she would be more focused -- and I wanted her to have the goal the focus the real ones -- so I told her, 'If you want to skip the year it's okay again that.' I kind of wish, maybe -- if I had done that I probably would have gone straight through and finished myself. But then my husband was the pusher, and when he got out of the army he pushed her to go. In fact, he walked her to the community college and watched her register. I didn't do that; I figured if she wants to do it, she'll do it. Because you can't really push anybody to do anything they don't want to do. So I thought when she wants to do it, she will, but he walked her to registration. And she bombed it; I had a feeling she would because I didn't see that 'I love school, I really want to make something of it.' I didn't see that in her. I just saw her, like I said, passive. I knew that eventually she was going to want to do it, and when she wanted to do it she was going to go gung ho, go straight to it. And that's exactly what happened. After she got married, had a child, then she was more focused and she had a reason to go to school, and sometimes you

got to have that reason. Not just because your mom and dad did it, but because there is a benefit of my going. You know some kids, especially kids who have had just about everything, they really haven't suffered financially or worked for anything, get used to that and they think everything is going to come to them. They don't realize that: Hey, I'm going to have to do work -- going to have to do some work before I can get what I want. And I think that's what it comes from; they have to think if I want what I want I'm going to have to work for it, so now I'm going to go for it. And I think that's what it took for her; I was kind of disappointed when she made bad grades but I was actually more disappointed after she got the divorce and didn't go back to school. That's when I said my attitude for her was "OK, it didn't work out for you, so take your child go to school, finish school, get yourself a good education and then find yourself a good man." But I didn't see that in her. I saw again the need for a family orientation; she needed a family. And so her focus on school kind of left for a while; she had been married, she was working hard, and school kind of died out. And we said, "Did you register for school?" And she said, "No, because I had to go to work." So work came first, and dating, and going out, and having friends, and the whole "my heart has a need" kind of played in her head. And so, I was really disappointed at that time.

And now she's back into it, you know gung ho. I'm supportive all the way, because now I see again the focus is back to where it's supposed to be, but I kind of wish it had been there before. She's been divorced, what, four years? It would have been enough time for her to have finished school, gotten herself an education and supported herself -- you know, stood up on her own and supported her family. She has found herself a nice man, and, hopefully, it will work for her and everything, but I think it could have been, you didn't need to be married, it could have been easier. And now that she's got her second child, too; I think now she's a little bit more focused and she's 27, she's a little more mature. So that's where my disappointment was, not when she finished high school, but afterwards, when I thought, "You have a perfect opportunity here," because she had my support 100%. I even told her one day if you want to quit your job I gave her an alternative I said you quit your job go full time to school and finish it out and then move out. Instead she decided to go to work and get her own apartment, and I was like, well, I gave her a chance. I would have supported her. She wouldn't have had to work; she would have had a house, food, you know, everything. I just wanted her to focus on her child and school. Now she's back in school and I'm supporting her again

making sure she finishes even if I have to take her myself and register her. And I know she will finish.

Jessica and her mother both mention the importance of some level of financial independence for today's women. Jessica disparages single mothers without any way to support themselves and their children "-- there are too many instances where people had children and they were housewives all their lives and something didn't go right, and they were stuck without anything. And I didn't want to do that. So I wanted to go back to school." And her mother makes the same argument when discussing her own education: "I got married and I had my kids, and then I went back to school because financially, I wanted to be able to support myself, you know, in case my marriage didn't work." I don't believe either of these women is being overly pessimistic, but they are trying to be realistic. Jessica is determined, now, to finish her degree and her mother is confident that her daughter will reach that goal.

Raphael went into the military after high school, but he doesn't deny the importance of a college education:

It's the key to success. You can have a marvelous idea, something big, that you can set the world free, you know, that would work. But if you want to be successful working wise, and you don't have a good idea, and you're not going to the NFL, you have to go to college. Education is the key. Nowadays it's what everybody is looking for. The world is different today. In the old

days, from what I've read, it was hard work that led to success.

Now it's like you have to be smart, with a computer and technology coming out everywhere, even in the army you have to be technologically smart. Everything is electronics, everything is run by electronics, and nowadays you have to get educated if you want to get a good job and succeed in life. Even if you are successful in running a business, you should still go to school and learn more.

Education gets you the cash -- you can be more successful. If you are working with the guy who has been to business school and you have not, who is going to get the better end of that deal?

Education is important. Right now, I can't get an education because of my work schedule. I'll just stay in the army. If you're not a college kid, you're not able to go to school full-time; you take one class at a time. It might take six years for a bachelor's, but hey, you're getting paid. Some of the best things in life come from setting goals. Once you set a goal, and accomplish it, you are psyched. You are looking for the next thing to do, the next goal to set, and college should be one of them. If the government wants crime and stuff like that to stop, it needs to start with education and kids, not with terrorism. Worry about what is going on here, and what's going on here is that there are a lot of school systems that are really messed up: make school a safe place, teach the

importance of education to young kids. When you get into college, you should be able to get more help from the government.

Education is expensive. Some kids have to join the Army and get the GI Bill, right? It costs four or five grand a semester at the top universities and to go to one of those you have got to have money. Your parents will have to save for 18 years to get you through, and sometimes your parents are not in the best situation to do that. It's not their fault; it's just things that happen. There are some countries out there where college education is free. I guess there are things you have to do, maybe, like join the Army for a couple of years, but your education is totally free. That would help a lot of people. So I just think they should preach more about the importance of education. More like Japan does to their kids. They are really big on education, and their kids will be educated.

Later in the interview, Raphael joked about what kind of student he might have been at 18:

I would not have made it earlier because I just like to party. Do you know how many women go to college? I'd have had a lot more fun. But I'm married now and have kids, and I'm much more mature. Doing what I do for the pay and seeing what I see now, I know that. I thought life was hard when I went off on my own, and now, wow, this is really hard. I don't like the army, but I think it has

taught me a lot. Being a teacher's kid, I'm proud that my mom is educated and my dad is also successful.

Raphael's mom has high praise for returning, nontraditional college students and recognizes what they bring to a college classroom:

Now that they are older, it is not the same experience. Now college is at a very different level. If they had gone in right after high school, it would have been a different experience; they understand it better now. They say to the other students, "Why are you skipping class? You're paying for this!" They understand, now that they are grown. Some kids have to find themselves first.

Some kids are not made to go one step to the next. When they find themselves, they can go through different steps in their lives. As a teacher, you see that in your own classroom. All you do is greet them, and on the first day of school you know who will pass and those who will not. They are all so different. You know them: your own and those you teach.

Raphael's mom has a special gift for recognizing the individuality of each of her students and each of her children. Raphael has come to understand the importance of an education and the hardship the high cost of education places on many families: "Education is expensive. Some kids have to join the Army and get the GI Bill, right? It costs four or five grand a semester at the top universities and to go to one of those you have got to have money," and he

added later in the interview “sometimes your parents are not in the best situation to do that. It's not their fault; it's just things that happen.” His mom seems to agree that returning to school after time in the military is good for some students: “They understand, now that they are grown. Some kids have to find themselves first. Some kids are not made to go one step to the next. When they find themselves, they can go through different steps in their lives.”

Timothy decided early in school that his plans for right after high school would not include college. His mother told me that he knew he wanted to travel and grow up some before college. When asked why he hadn't started college yet, he replied:

College is not what it should be. I disagree with the way most "higher education" is becoming more forced education. I don't think enough young adults continue their education out of a desire to learn, and therefore, college is not necessarily the best place for scholarly endeavors. Simply, why look for an education where the majority of the participants do not want one, or they only want enough credits to earn a degree and a safe place in society. This is a very broad question, and the answer is rambling. My parents were supportive; they always have been. They want me in school, but it does not seem possible because of my own ideals, lack of money, lack of time, I don't know. I do like talking with them, and I think I hold my own in discussion. We've never stopped a debate

on atheism, the war in Iraq, controlled substances, bogus cops, etc. because they feel I needed a diploma to talk to them or validate my ideas. So, why *should* I be in college is a better question, but answering a question with a question is being snide. Right? Next question.

Timothy's mother was not surprised at her son's decision at eighteen:

Well, he really made it clear he wasn't ready for college. He told us when -- I think like when he was about 16 -- that his plan was to go across country and to travel. And he was anxious to do that. I think he felt like we raised him -- and we did -- in a tiny community. And, you know, he didn't really approve of where we raised him until much more recently. Now he's come back to the area and is living here and he appreciates this part of the country and the beauty, and he appreciates the rural quality of the area. But when he was in high school, he was dying to experience the cities and the West Coast. And he just -- he knew he wasn't ready. He told me that when he turned 23 he'd be ready for college -- he told me that at one point, I forget when. But he actually has just turned 22 and plans to have some courses this fall, so it's a little ahead of schedule. I guess when he was a baby, I couldn't have imagined him not going straight from high school into college. But that's just not how that turned out. And I'm really grateful that he's not one of

the kids that went to college and wasted their parents' tuition money. Because I know colleagues that that's happened to, and people who aren't teachers that that's happened to -- and it's really expensive for them to get there and just party, or what ever -- play video games or surf the Internet. So we knew early on that he didn't want to go to college right after high school. And there was just -- like we really didn't have a discussion because it was so clear that that's not what he wanted, and he had his own plan. It's not what we would have liked, but it seems to have worked out now. It was hard for some time to have him bouncing around and not staying in one place and our not seeing him, but we didn't feel like we had any choice.

I asked her if she knew where he got the idea that he could travel across the country. She explained:

I think there is this whole network of kids that -- and he's not really an anarchist any more, which is a good thing -- but it is a whole part of the youth culture. So, like I didn't know how he found places to stay, and but you know now he's more open and I guess -- and this is what I had gathered while he was traveling -- there are these places that are, that provide housing and you can crash there. And there is this network. I'm sure quite a bit of it is through the Internet. He didn't have a computer or laptop and he was

traveling, but he would go to public libraries and e-mail his friends that way. So he knew -- I mean, he learned how to live on nothing. And that's helping him now, because he's saving money to buy a house. So he has really come, you know, a long way in his thinking.

Timothy is one young man, raised in a small community, whose idea of education was first of all tied to expanding his physical horizons. Travel and exploration were both part of his maturation process. He has also voiced some dissatisfaction with higher education as he perceives it, but he hasn't started classes anywhere yet. His mother has trusted him to make his own decisions: "Well, he really made it clear he wasn't ready for college. He told us when -- I think like when he was about 16 -- that his plan was to go across country and to travel. And he was anxious to do that." "And he just -- he knew he wasn't ready."

-- like we really didn't have a discussion because it was so clear that that's not what he wanted, and he had his own plan. It's not what we would have liked, but it seems to have worked out now. It was hard for some time to have him bouncing around and not staying in one place and our not seeing him, but we didn't feel like we had any choice.

Timothy decided early that he wouldn't go to college at eighteen, and his parents accepted his decision and trusted his judgment, but they still hope to see him attend college.

Stephanie's career goal setting was complicated by relationships and her desire for a family:

My senior year I was still looking toward the medical field, and I started looking at schools around here. And then, of course, I got into a relationship, and then it all had to do with "Where is he going to college?" My boyfriend at the time was going to school in Florida, so I started looking at schools in Florida, and I found the University of Tampa. I was looking hard into their bachelor's degree for health and human services. I was all ready to do that, we actually visited Tampa and everything, and then we broke up. I broke up with that boyfriend and got another one. And of course he was staying in Texas, so I wanted to stay in Texas, and I had applied to [two local schools]. Mom had actually told me, when I wanted to go to Tampa, "You could take your first two years here and then transfer there," and, of course, stubborn me, I was like: no, no, no, no, no.

And then, of course, I changed my mind and decided on [the local college], and I got scholarships and everything. I actually got it all paid for because it was just a community college, so through my scholarships I had gotten it all paid for, and she was fine with that. And I was going to college, and I was doing great. And then I decided to get married. And she didn't take that one so well. She

said she wanted me to finish my two year degree before I got married and she thought that would be better. Well, my fiancé was moving back up north and, you know, she had kind of always said before you move away and move out of the house, you should be married. And so I kind of took that to -- what she had said a couple years before -- and took that and remembering it and went ahead and got married before we moved. That way we would have insurance and everything and I would be all set to move. And of course, she was very worried about my education. And I told her, "I'll keep going," and of course, she didn't believe me. And I think a big part of that is because she herself didn't keep going right away; she eventually went back, but she got married after she got her two year degree and then didn't go back for quite some time. And so I moved up north and I did continue going to school. Now, I was working full time, so I wasn't going to school full-time, but I did keep going to school and then we moved back here, and I still continue to go to school you after I had my daughter, and I actually got my associates degree this last May. So I finished that much so far, and, I mean, I plan on going further. It's just going to take a little more time. And I think she's happy that I'm planning on going further, and she supports that. But at the same time she, you

know, knows that I have a family and she knows that they come first, and she understands that. And she supports that.

Stephanie's mom clearly recognized that there were outside influences directing her daughter's college choices. In answer to the question, "Why didn't your daughter go to college?" she replied:

A man. It really was. And they dissuaded my daughter, and it wasn't just one man, it was two. The guy she was dating when she graduated from high school made her change her plans and want to go to his school because that was the state that he was going to be in. It really made her, you know, the focus only on one geographical area instead of exploring options. Of course, going out of state made her explore options because we couldn't afford that. She did get a \$24,000 scholarship to a school that cost \$28,000 at year, so it was still impractical. And then she broke up with him and started going out with another man, who is the man she is married to now. He changed her mind again -- I mean, I'm sure it was a discussion between the two of them, and I don't blame him because it was her decision to make. But the reason she made it was due to the fact, I believe, that he was afraid that if she went off to college, stayed in the dorm, she would find somebody else eventually to replace him. And so he made the argument that I had made: why don't you stay here and go to a

local college and make a little money for yourself and then go off the last two years of college and we'll help you do that then? But of course because we suggested it, it was not a good idea. In fact, we were told that the community college was only for dropouts, not for people who were worth their salt and could get into any other college. And then, two months later she decided, "I'm going to the community college, and I'm going to stay home, and I'm going to earn money because I think that's the right thing to do. My boyfriend and I have talked." And you know it was just so -- it was a man. I know it was. It was just a man. And for some reason, that took priority over 12 years of school when the focus was: "I'm going to college and this is what I am going to study and this is what I'm going to do with my life, then I want to get married." So, you know, she did want to get married and she did want to have kids young, and that was always a focus. And so she kind of reloaded it and said: OK maybe I'll be a physician's assistant. And she looked into that, and then she decided she'd specialize and she thought: OK this'll take four or five years and then I can move on with that. She always wanted those dual things: she wanted a family young and hoped that she would find the right man to have a family with, and she wanted college. But what stopped her from pursuing the four years right away, what caused her to give up all

her scholarships and move up north was his family -- she stayed here for the first year and then his family moved North and they followed. He is four years older than she is and he had to move and whatever. It didn't bother me that they needed to move; I mean, we moved away when we were young, and it was the best thing for us. But she lost a lot too -- she had her whole two years paid for at the community college and she lost every scholarship she had, and -- it was a man.

I was just really thrown for a loop, because college was her goal. I wasn't living my life vicariously through her; this wasn't some set of goals that I had planned for her. This was her goal setting.

Everything that she did, all the things that she excelled in in high school, it was her setting those goals and her saying: this is what I want and this is what I want to do, and I'm going to go for it and get it done. I helped pave the way for my kids to get whatever done needed to be done, you know. I helped by taking them places and getting them to what they needed to do, and working out schedules so that it happened. So it threw me for a big loop, and we discussed it at length. And I said: "You're doing this for a man.

You'd better be really sure that this is what you want because you're giving up your life goal." At least this is what I perceived. I remember I said: "Maybe this is all a farce; maybe the last 12

years of your life had been a farce. I don't know. But I'm finding out I don't know you, because I don't understand." I couldn't fathom it; it was just -- it was incomprehensible to me. And it still is in some ways. But I guess love is like that. But I still couldn't see why she loved him, because he is so different, so different from her. And I mean, I guess, who can question love? I mean, that's a hard thing, too, because I'm going from the spiritual love and to this worldly thing, you know, goal setting thing, and obviously, they don't mix or they don't necessarily mix, or you can't -- I don't know. Somehow they need to go hand-in-hand and I wasn't putting them hand in hand or something.

And both of them would argue, rationalize this, too: "Well, you were married young." And I did. I was married at 20, and I finished my two year degree, and I got married before I could finish the rest. And I don't regret anything that I did; I don't regret it at all. I would never take back and do it differently. So for them, I was proof that you can get married young and you can stick it out and you can make it. And I said: "I'm not arguing that point. I'm not saying you're too young. That's not my point." You know, whether I thought that or not it wasn't anything I ever brought up. My argument was, you know, this was your goal, and that you're throwing it away. You could get married to the guy after college;

you could still see him; you could still do everything. I said: "Have your cake and eat it too. You're living with the guy." And they did live together for about three months, but I said I don't agree with it, so any support you're getting from me is gone. And then she moved back home again after three months. She was over 18 and didn't have a curfew, but I usually knew where she was, and I told her "If you really love each other, tell him 'I've got to finish school.' Tell him, 'I've got homework; I can't be out with you until four in the morning.'" Anyway, yeah, so we discussed it at length but her mind was made up before she talked to me. So anything I was going to say was moot. But I had to say it; I couldn't not say it, because it just came spilling out. But, her mind was made up, and once her mind is made up, you weren't going to change it. I suppose the things that have changed are because of circumstances and because she's matured and learned. But, yeah, I mean, maybe it wasn't discussion. Maybe it was just a one-way conversation. She told me what she was going to do, and I just vented all my feelings to her. Because, like I said, her mind was made up. So she wasn't going to defend it, or deny it, or turn it over and say: "Well yeah, I'll think about what you have been saying and come back to you later" -- it was: "I'm doing it."

Stephanie and her mother had some conflict around the time of the

daughter's high school graduation, but they were not arguing so much over the value of an education as over the best relative timing of starting a family and getting an education. Stephanie admitted to being influenced by her boyfriends and their plans, but her mother viewed her decision-making as being negatively impacted by the men in her life. The complication here seems to be that the mother's educational path was temporarily sidetracked by marriage and family, and her daughter could point to her mother's history to validate her projected journey to a degree. The reflection of the mother in the daughter's narrative is extensive. It is clear that these discussions have taken place. Stephanie is still determined to finish her degree and her mother is still dealing with the emotions tied to her daughter's earlier decisions. The mother's conclusion, however, is that:

Maybe it was just a one-way conversation. She told me what she was going to do, and I just vented all my feelings to her. Because, like I said, her mind was made up. So she wasn't going to defend it, or deny it, or turn it over and say: "Well yeah, I'll think about what you have been saying and come back to you later" -- it was: "I'm doing it."

Melanie did go away to school, but seldom went to class, and withdrew at the end of one semester. When asked what she remembered about her decision she said:

I did not have the drive or motivation for it. I did not know what I wanted to be when I grew up yet, at all. I think I've finally figured that out, now that I'm 30. When we decided I'd be better off at home, it wasn't bad. I felt bad. I didn't know if they'd understand. I was sort of lost for awhile, and it was disappointing for everybody. I wanted to go to school. I wanted to be ready. I wanted to know what I wanted to do, but I didn't want to waste thousands of dollars drinking beer and shooting pool and not doing anything else in school. So, I figured it made more sense to come home and hang out here for a while. Then I fell in love, and we got married, I had a baby, and we moved away and I didn't get back to school. Now, my kids are in school and I want to go back for a degree.

Melanie's mom tried to sympathize with her daughter's confusion about school:

I always knew I wanted to teach. There was never any doubt in my mind that this was going to be my career. I was sorry that my daughter couldn't decide on what she really wanted to do with her life. She kept worrying that we were disappointed in her, and I kept trying to explain that we weren't blaming her, we were just sad that she couldn't decide. I guess, because she was bright and had done well in school, I just assumed that she wanted to go to college and get a degree in something. She thought that taking

general classes was wasting money. So, she came home and then she got married right away. I thought she was finally happy, but her options sort of disappeared.

This family didn't remember much discussion about the daughter's educational decisions. The mother "just assumed" that a bright student would want to go to college, but Melanie could find no motivation in general courses without a clear career goal. Like Stephanie, a husband and family were also goals for Melanie, and they became attainable.

Christopher's vision of his life after high school was different from his parents' idea of a career choice:

I was not completely, totally shut off to going to college but it wasn't going to be the way my parents wanted, and so I knew it wasn't going to be an option. My mom's rule was that my first year had to be junior-college and live at home, if they were going to pay for school or help me with school. Otherwise, they would not help me with school in any way, shape, or form. And I did not want to go to community college. I didn't want to stay at home for another year and go to school for another year living in my parents' house. I just didn't want to do it; I was 17 and just tired, you know, of my parents. At 17, 18 years old when you graduate from high school either one of two things happens. Your child is the valedictorian and has scholarships to every school in the nation and then there's

no problem. The parents are proud of you -- hey, life's great. Or your child grows his hair down to his butt and wants to be in a rock band. And my mom and dad didn't necessarily approve that. And so there was tension at that time in my life between me and my parents. We had a rough time for about a year or two; my parents were mad at me a lot and they didn't agree with my decisions and things like that. And I didn't want to be under their rule, so to speak, anymore. I was going to just set out to somewhere and do my own thing even if it was stupid. I probably should have done what my parents wanted me to do, which was go to community college for a year, but that just wasn't an option for me at that time. I wasn't going to be living at home, going to school again for another year, getting in trouble, having my parents breathing down my neck. That was kind of the way I felt at that time in my life. And so it was just like, you know, it was just like college came and went and the window of opportunity just passed me by. And I just didn't go. I took jobs, and I was going to be in a band, and I wanted to be a professional musician. You know, at that time I felt like school didn't have anything for me. You know what I mean? Now, all I was into and interested in at that time in my life was music; that's all I wanted to do was play music. I wanted to play guitar, be in bands, and play music. So I will say that I kind of was

hoping that what my parents would have done was recognized that and understood that they didn't have a child that really cared to sit around and study English again for another year, or math, or science and that maybe they would have sent me to a music school to study music or even like a trade-type school, and go study like music production and engineering and songwriting and you know that kind of thing. But it was just like there was no discussion about it. It was just: "You're going to go to community college and study math and science and English again for another year and then we'll talk after that." And see, because I think my parents kept thinking music was just a phase and it wasn't something that in a year I would still care about. You know what I mean? But it wasn't, you know, it was -- I mean, I still play music to this day. I have a piano in my living room. I'm teaching my kids how to play piano. You know, I play with different bands, and you know I will always play music. It's something that I will do. It's a passion of mine. You know, my parents are not the artsy type of people; they are very conservative, business minded you know, money, you know, job, career that kind of stuff. You know, normal type things -- they kind of really don't understand the arts at all. We had a piano in my house my whole life growing up, and it was just used like a coffee table. It's still sitting in my parents' house

and nobody plays it, except for me when I come over and that's it. So you know they keep that for some reason, but they just have stuff sitting on top of it, and it looks nice as a decoration, and any time somebody goes over to play it, they're like: "Hey, can you play softer or can you --." You know, because they just really don't get it; they don't understand it. And so I felt like at that time in my life my parents weren't interested in supporting what it was I wanted. They weren't the type of parents to sit down and say "What are your dreams, what are your goals, and how can we support you? How can we help you? If music is what you want, that's what you want to do? Great, let's go after it. Let's get you up to New York and try to get you into Juilliard. Let's go to Berkeley. Let's see, let's go to North Texas and Denton and talk about getting you in there." You know what I mean? None of that stuff was discussed. It was like: go to college, get a major in business or some kind of thing. And it was like, I didn't have any interest in that, and so I just felt like they didn't have any interest in anything I wanted; it was either that, their way, or the highway, you know. So I said: OK. I'll just go out and play in rock bands, and play in clubs, I guess until I become the next big rock star. And that's what I chose to do, and I took odd jobs and was broke for six years, seven years, you know. Never had any money for seven years

until I got into my mid twenties. But, you know, that's what I did, and that's just the path that I ended up going on. And I don't regret it in any way, shape, or form.

I wished that I would have gone to college just so that I didn't have to stay in the [business that I'm in], if I didn't want to. Because there are times when I just don't like [this business]. But I still get to play music and this business affords me the opportunity to go out and buy pianos and guitars and, you know, teach my kids musical instruments. And you know I play at church every Sunday and on Wednesdays, and so I have my group that I play with. So I still get a chance to pursue music and do it the way that I want to do it. But you know, I think that had I known then what I know now I maybe would've said: "OK I'll go to community college for year," and tried to work out a deal with my parents. I'll go for a year with the understanding that at the end of the year, I want to get into music, you know, production type thing, going and learning how to get a career in music outside of just being a rock star. Because actually there are millions of people who work in the music industry whose name and face you'll never see, and they make plenty of money. You know they have good incomes, they are producers, engineers, they have their own studios, they work for record labels, they're industry executives, you know, things like that. And I could

have done any of those things and still been able to be around music.

But, you know, it was just kind of one of those things. And it's funny, because it's still a subject even to this day that we kind of don't really visit a lot. I love my parents. I love my mom and dad, don't get me wrong. My parents are great parents, it's just that they kind of didn't really understand, you know. When I got in trouble at the house, my mom would take my guitar from me. You know, like she would put me on guitar restriction, and she would take my guitar for six weeks, or three weeks, or what ever, you know, because they thought music was just a hobby, something I wanted to goof around with -- you know what I mean? Like some parents -- like if my kids ever went out and bought their own musical instruments and stuff like that, then if my kids got in trouble or did something wrong, sure there's punishment and stuff, but the last thing I would do is take their musical instruments away. You know, because I don't see it as a hobby, I see it as something different. My parents thought it was like, you know, video games. You know: it's just like a PlayStation or Nintendo, it's just something he plays around with for fun. And that's the thing they just never got, you know, what I was. In sixth-grade, I was writing

my own songs, but they just didn't get that, and never really understood that.

Christopher's mom was happy to talk about her son's senior year and his college decision:

Well, it was our assumption that he would go on to college. He was in the gifted program; he was bright. We had that traditional expectation; go to school, go to college, get a good job that you had a potential for higher earning and a better living. If you had a college degree, it gave you options, and it was just kind of an unspoken expectation and understanding, I think. My husband went back to school to get his associates degree when the boys were older. And he said he wanted to do it for himself, but the main reason he wanted to do it was for them to see the college experience and that he valued it. My husband was overseas when it came time to be applying for scholarships our son's senior year. His grades were kind of going up and down toward the end there; he wasn't focusing, keeping the standard we had set for him. So he might go on restriction for a period of time when grade reports came out, and we would monitor it for awhile and depending on whether he was on or off restriction for the weekend. And then when grade reports would be back where they should be, he was

off restriction. That last semester, this was a pretty frequent cycle we went through.

I noticed that he was not bringing home the forms or the paperwork, or meeting the deadlines that I had set for him to bring the scholarship paperwork in for us to apply and see what was out there. And I was puzzled, because this was not like him. And then, when I addressed it more firmly, he'd say OK, but then it was like it got missed again or forgotten. And he would make excuses - - and this is where it came back to benefiting having been a teacher, because I knew the system -- and I'd say: "Well, you can go at this point in time," or "I know that you're allowed at this time"; he may have had time between classes. So the excuse, "I don't have time to get there," didn't work. And then -- I'm thinking it was probably a month, maybe two months before school was out, pretty close to the end -- he said: "Mom, I need to tell you something. I don't want to go to college." I was surprised. I asked him why he didn't say something -- I don't know if he was afraid of how we would react to or if he thought we would be disappointed that he didn't go -- but probably, he just didn't want to deal with it. And it was OK with me. I mean, I was surprised, like I said, but not upset or angry. Because I told him, I said: "Well, if you don't want to go, the last thing we want you to do is go. We don't want you to

spend the money if it's not something you want to do. And that's OK; just remember the day after you graduate, you'll either be a future student or a member of the workforce. That makes the whole difference in the expectations for you that day after graduation." And we told him that at any time down the road, if he decided he wanted to go back to school, if he felt like that there would be that possibility -- he may find out that whatever he would find might not be as appealing as he thought. At that time, he thought he was going to be the next rock star -- in his mind -- so we just said: "If you decide you want to go, come back and talk to us. And based on when that is and what our circumstances are, we will do what we can to assist you if you decide to go to school." And that was pretty well the end of the subject. And we all went merrily on our way. And I don't think we ever -- I don't recall ever discussing it again after that. He didn't bring it up. To this point, he's not said that he wanted to go back to school. That's our college story.

As I was leaving this interview, Christopher's mom remembered another story about her son's senior year. She came home one afternoon after an early-out, a teacher in-service meeting held after the students had been dismissed. Her sons knew that they were not to have anyone in the house if the adults were not home. As she came through the front door, she heard someone playing the

piano. She recognized “Chariots of Fire,” and yelled, “Who’s here with you?” Her son said, “Nobody’s here. I’m playing the piano.” She said, “We never knew he could play real music; he always just asked us to listen to the stuff his band was playing.”

The role of music in this young man’s life is a mystery to his teacher-parent. For this family there seems to have been a “generation gap” that primarily existed in music. It’s ironic that both Christopher and his mom include in their narratives that the subject of college has not been brought up since the years right after high school. She concluded: “And that was pretty well the end of the subject. And we all went merrily on our way. And I don’t think we ever -- I don’t recall ever discussing it again after that. He didn’t bring it up. To this point, he’s not said that he wanted to go back to school.” But that isn’t exactly mirrored in his observation: “And it’s funny, because it’s still a subject even to this day that we kind of don’t really visit a lot. I love my parents. I love my mom and dad, don’t get me wrong. My parents are great parents, it’s just that they kind of didn’t really understand, you know.”

Summary of Research Questions #3 and #4

The dynamics of the college decision-making process varied in each family. In many cases the teacher parents were supportive of their children and

validated their individuality. In others the teacher parents placed higher demands and expectations on their children, although while remaining supportive of them in no case where the parents disinterested or unsupportive of their children as they worked through this decision.

Summary and Conclusions

The young adults in this study grew up in homes in which education was highly valued. For the most part their experience of school was positive, and they viewed having a parent who is a teacher as beneficial. There were also some disadvantages for them, notably a sense of exposure and increased expectations because they were teachers' kids. This was the context in which these young adults made their decisions about college attendance and thus the context for the two major findings of this study. For the young adults, all valued education but they had no sense of urgency about pursuing formal education immediately after high school. Their decisions were shaped by particular life circumstances and, for many, a belief that a college education wasn't relevant at that point in their lives. The second finding concerns the teacher-parents. These educators assumed that their children would go on to college, but they didn't pressure them to do so; their primary concern was that their children be happy. Like their children, they also recognize that college is always an option.

The following consistencies emerged from this research as recurrent themes:

First of all, the participants all recognize what good teaching requires. Teacher-parents see an ideal teacher as one who is “caring,” “compassionate,” “attentive,” and “knowledgeable.” Young adults remember “good teachers” as ones who were “connected to the students,” “interested in what students had to say,” “respectful of students’ opinions,” “interested in students’ opinions,” and “hard-working.” These aspects of learner-centered pedagogy would seem logically to mirror a home environment that was supportive and challenging.

Several of the young adults stressed that living with a teacher made them realize how much work goes into good teaching and made them very intolerant of poor teachers. It is also apparent that the students expected the kind of one-on-one attention from teachers that parents give their children. The mothers in this study were teachers who saw academic diversity among their students everyday, and accepted that students have a variety of strengths and weaknesses. It was perhaps easier for them to accept an alternative educational path for their own young adults, but they all seemed to assume that getting a degree would have been an easier path.

A second theme that emerged detailed the cost/benefit balance of being a teacher’s kid. There were some negative experiences of actually being in a teacher-parent’s class. Neither the young adults nor their parents thought that was a good situation. Being in the same building was less problematic, and in

some cases, was seen as distinctly beneficial. Several young adults lightheartedly remembered not having to worry about being without lunch money if mom was in the building. There were mixed responses to the ready availability of a parent on campus. Several of the teacher-parents had stories of being expected to deal with problems which otherwise never would have received parental notice.

The young adults felt some heightened expectations from their teachers because of their parent's position. There was also some sense of exposure in being recognized as a teacher's kid and their teachers having immediate access to their mom. They also voiced some added incentive not to "mess up" because mom was sure to find out. The young adults distinctly remember wanting their teacher-parents to be proud of their achievements and their behavior and noted that "embarrassing mom" was often a part of a decision to work hard on a project, study for a test, or choose not to misbehave.

Another benefit the young adults recognized was the parent's knowledge of how to "work the system" if necessary. Some spoke of dropping classes or changing teachers and how that process was facilitated by the teacher-parent. The teacher-parents (many of them military wives) spoke of being able to help their kids when they were changing schools by having a firm grasp on where their children were in terms of placement and academic achievement. Most teacher-parents saw little benefit in having a heightened awareness of every little transgression their children committed during school hours. Colleagues'

expectations of the teacher-parent stepping in instantly as a parent were considered unfair to the parent and the child.

In considering whether their homes were in any way different from other houses where there wasn't a teacher-parent, the participants judged the "normalcy" of their life at home. The teacher-parents weren't sure that theirs were the only houses where homework was always checked, but there was careful oversight. The teacher-parents also said that it was helpful to know how to help their children with homework without "doing it for them." The young adults also remembered getting help with homework -- "I had the best proofreader among my friends" -- and having homework be a priority. Some of the young adults were less positive about this aspect of having a teacher-parent, especially in high school. The pervasive grade-checking was sometimes more punitive for the teachers' kids. "I was always on restriction." Some of the young adults remembered homes that were "always full of kids" and books. Their teacher-parents were adults whose involvement with young people extended to church groups and other after school activities, or whose houses had reference books and lots of help with homework. Some young adults remembered the "learning environment" aspect of being a teacher's kid. Vacation trips often included historical sights and "reading about a place before we went."

Some teacher-parents remembered having some concerns about sending their child to a friend's house if the teacher knew too much about the friend's family situation. This is where parental concern and teacher access to privileged

information sometimes created a problem for the children. Such cases were rare. The final general questions about school asked the participants to gauge the teacher-parents' ability to separate her two roles appropriately. Most of the young adults were comfortable with the way their teacher-parent generally handled this issue. The teacher-parents were less confident that they had always been able to be both the parent and a fellow teacher as needed. The emergence of particular expectations and added stress for teachers' kids within the education environment and in their own homes was consistent.

Several issues have emerged from the research as reasons for not going to college or not staying in college right after high school. Several participants voiced concern about the cost of education. Spending money on courses not clearly related to a degree plan, or changing majors and losing credits already earned prompted some participants to withdraw from college, or to "earn some money" before starting a degree. It would be hard to distinguish whether wasting the money was just the obvious result of undefined career goals and lack of motivation or if immaturity caused the lack of goals. Either way, those were the deterrents identified by several of the participants. The teacher-parents acknowledged that not everyone is "ready" for college at eighteen and were willing to allow their teens to wait.

For many of the young adults in this study, a strong desire to "live life"-- marriage, family, military, travel, music – took precedence over academic pursuits. For several of these participants, these alternatives to higher

education presented themselves forcefully. The three young women in this study were each married by age twenty, and now, in their late twenties or early thirties, each has two children, has been divorced, and is remarried. The young men in this study had other choices as well: the military, travel, and music. The three men who are older and more established in a career are satisfied that they made the right choice; the youngest participant is still searching.

Uncertainty about ultimate career choices caused many of the young adults in this study to postpone post-secondary education goals. The young women in this study still see options for themselves as their children get older and are in school. This is possibly a reflection of their mothers' continued educational achievement while their daughters were growing up. The teacher-parents still have hope for their daughters' education plans.

Another obvious consistency in this study is that these young adults feel less urgency to get a degree than others in society may be imposing. The most recent studies of young adults reflect the ubiquitous nature of "learning" in today's society. Technology expands and job re-training is required at almost every level. Job insecurity forces a need for continuously "upgrading" one's resume. Perhaps the participants in this study foresaw the trend toward continuous education and just sat out a few cycles. No one in this study limits college attendance to students between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two.

Most of the teacher-parents in this study were concerned that their young

adults were not making the best decision, but they were generally willing to let the decision be the young adult's. There is some resignation that the young adults have chosen the "hard way," but that they will probably still get a degree. Perhaps the fact that each of the teacher-parents in this study continued her own education while her children were in school -- some completed degrees, some earned advanced degrees, others worked toward special certifications -- has reinforced the idea that education will always be available.

Most of the young adults still see a college degree as something worthwhile, but they feel that clear career goals need to come first. Some of the young adults have admitted that they missed an opportunity, but feel that they are now better equipped to "get something out of college." Some are adamant that they weren't ready at eighteen to be a college student, and couldn't see "wasting the money." The general conclusion of this study is that these participants are happy with, or resigned to, the decisions they have made. The emergence of particular expectations and added stress for teachers' kids within the education environment and in their own homes was consistent.

CHAPTER V

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

One important frame for any discussion of the findings of this study would be the teacher-parent participants' perspectives on college. Each of the women in this study has been a lifelong learner. Each of them has continued her education while working in her profession and raising a family. What many of them worked so hard to achieve after they were married -- a four year degree -- was a gift they had hoped to give to their own bright children.

Their mothers' years in and out of education gave their children a different perspective on the urgency of a four-year degree. Their children also saw the determination and motivation needed to take classes while being a teacher, wife, and mother. Without the same clear career goals, the young adult's were not driven to pursue a degree. Because their mothers worked so hard to become a teacher or to earn an advanced degree, their children expected their own career choice and educational drive to come *before* pursuing a degree. Without the career direction they saw in their mothers' schooling, they decided to achieve in other ways.

A second frame for discussion of these findings could be the University of Chicago's Sloan Study and the wealth of quantitative and qualitative data gathered by Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, and their colleagues

during that study. The support/challenge matrix which they devised to identify family-type could be applied to this study as well. The four-quadrant matrix measures the level of support and challenge perceived within the family dynamic. They, therefore, fall into high support/high challenge, high support/low challenge, low support/high challenge, and low support/low challenge family types. In comparing the narratives authored by the participants in my study with the items on the SCQ, I could tentatively identify the family types for these families.

In my opinion, the participants in this study represent three of the four family types defined by a support/challenge matrix. Comments showing high levels of both challenge and support include: “And we knew he was capable of A’s but because he was a child we accepted B’s. We felt like that was our compromise to letting him enjoy life.” Another teacher-parent remembered: “I always asked how their day was when they walked in the door.[...] I always wanted to know when I could be involved in going to school.”

The quadrant of that matrix which would show evidence of high challenge but lower support might be indicated by remarks such as : “[...] the day after you graduate, you’ll either be a future student or a member of the work force.” One of the young adults remembered: “They actually kind of forced me to go to college. I graduated on Friday and was going to college on Monday morning at eight o’clock. My dad forged my signature and sent me to University.”

Other families in this study seem to represent a combination of lower challenge and high support. These parents deliberately avoid “pushing” their children in any pre-determined direction. They are anxious for each child to make independent decisions. They are careful to treat each student in their classrooms as individuals, and they validate their own children’s individuality. “She told me what she was going to do. Her mind was made up, so she wasn’t going to defend it, or deny it, or turn it over.” Another parent recalled: “We really didn’t have a discussion, because it was so clear that that’s not what he wanted and he had his own plan.” And, sadly, “Maybe I should have pushed her harder. She’s still struggling.” The “family type” frame could generate extensive discussion from this study.

A third frame for discussion of these findings acknowledges the emerging field of youth studies. In the epilogue to their study, Dwyer and Wynn claim:

The difficulty is that once the cross-cultural evidence is examined and critically assessed, and once the inherent contradictions in the established literature between the strands of "crisis" and the "normative" modeling are taken seriously, the need to pay more attention to evidence from young people and not merely evidence about them on pre-set adult-driven agendas becomes decisive. It is not a question of naïvely accepting what they have to say, or of ignoring their failings and the inadequacies in their accounts, but it is a question of researching *with* them to uncover the real

significance of the changes that they -- unlike ourselves -- have spent their *whole* lives within. (202)

It is important to recognize that teachers' kids' have a unique and valuable perspective on education in this country. They alone see our profession from both sides, simultaneously. They can recognize good teaching and tell us what they perceive about parenting and teaching. Whether their insights are gathered retrospectively, as I have done in this study, or in real time, as the Sloan study managed to do, it is important to listen to the kids. Dwyer and Wynn quoted from a presentation given at a forum in Australia in 1999:

I think the criticism I have about the last two days is that we have been talking about young adults, and I believe we should be talking with young adults. My experience is that they are highly articulate, they know what their problems are and today have a fair idea about what the solutions could be. They should be involved in any policy development that involves what is going to happen to the future of work and learning for them. They are very clear from the very disadvantaged to the most advantage about what is wrong with the current system and what changes need to be made to make it work. (204)

Finally, it is my hope that teacher-researchers will recognize the importance of validating the life experience shared by children and families of teachers. The inexplicable lack of attention paid to teachers and their families

can be corrected by researchers. This study presents some of the benefits and drawbacks of being a teacher's kid as perceived by teachers' kids of public school teachers. Teacher-parents have a different perspective on children in our society: in the lower grades, they meet 20 to 30 different children every year; in the secondary schools, they are responsible for up to 150 young lives every year. If these are teachers who validate the individual strengths and weaknesses of each student and recognize the wide range of developmental ability within any chronologically homogenous group, is it surprising that they were more open to a nontraditional college choice made by their son or daughter?

In comparing this study to studies already completed with preachers' kids, there is definitely some consistency in the perception among the young adults that their parents' position in the community or within the school system does place added pressure on children. The PK literature describes this as "visibility" or "living in a bubble." I have labeled this same vulnerability "exposure." There doesn't seem to be any doubt that the added pressures exist, but there are different ways to handle the experience. The PK literature suggests that a "loving" and "supportive" home and a "good example" are all effective antidotes to this added pressure. I would suggest that the example of continuous schooling set by the teacher-parents in this study may have, inadvertently, set an example for their teens to put off seeking a four-year degree.

At the end of each interview, partially because I did not want the interviews to end on any kind of a negative note and partially because I value the opinions on education my participants hold, I asked what they thought should be done to improve education.

Many of my participants suggested that public school education needs to include more vocational education. "I would love to see kind of a tracking system where those who didn't care about the academics had an excellent technological or vocational program that they could go into, so they could kind of decide what they would want to do when they got out." Another teacher agreed, "In high school, I don't think all kids need to be going through all this college prep stuff. I think, almost like the Europeans do, where they have the opportunity to get into a good trade school. There would be a lot less kids dropping out if they could say, 'Hey, I'm a good electrician; I'm a good plumber; I'm a good what ever.'" A young adult participant said this about the vocational classes: "I think it should be mandatory, if the kid is not taking upper level courses, he's not taking pre- calculus, if he's not taking the harder sciences, make him take a vocational class. There aren't enough options for kids to take to plan for life."

Most of these teachers and their young adults recognized some disparity in the responsibility teachers carry compared with the support and compensation they receive. "More money would be good. I think it would give us more prestige, you know, it would give us more pull. But if I was to change anything, I

think I would change the class size." One of the teacher's kids suggested, "I think a little bit extra pay would be nice because it's kind of low out there." Another young adult observed, "The teachers are underpaid and they're getting the short end of the stick and they're whittling that stick even smaller and smaller. Society has to take care of the people that are taking care of and educating our kids. Teachers are getting burned out." Speaking of legislators and administrators, a teacher said: "If they would get out of the offices and come into the classroom, they would learn what works in the classroom. They would understand what we go through every day. They don't care about the kids; they just care if they can pass the test."

Whereas standardized tests were generally seen as counterproductive, many of my participants wished that some better form of career guidance and realistic goal setting, what Schneider and Stevenson called "aligned ambition," could be developed. Speaking of someone he knows who teaches in Europe, one young adult suggested:

I think there should be more vocational training. Over there, in 10th grade they take a test. If you do well in the test, you continue to be persuaded to go in this direction. And it's not just a test of what you know, it's a test on personality, and if you do poorly on the test, in a sense it's kind of bad, but they direct you away from college. But I think there should be more Geiger counters out there, if you will, to kind of feel where the kids are going. You

know if you have no idea where the kids are going, how do you lead them?

The participants in my study speak from experience -- and that is a hard-won and valuable vantage point. There are many possibilities for further research into the lives, perspectives, and attitudes of teachers' kids.

Recommendations

This study is retrospective: both the teacher-parents and the young adults are recalling experiences that occurred sometime in the past. While this study shows some of the complexities of the dynamic surrounding the decisions about college in families where education is highly valued, even more would be learned by studying this question in "real time." I would recommend studying a cohort of teachers' kids and their teacher-parents during the teens' senior year in high school in order to better understand how these decisions are made and what differences there might be in the process between teachers' kids who choose to go to college and those who do not.

I would also recommend that more studies be designed to explore and illuminate the lives of teachers' kids and their teacher-parents. Perhaps more research will disallow some of the assumptions about higher education and participation in post-secondary schooling voiced by the participants in this study.

Conclusions

Let me reiterate the two major findings of this study: For the young adults, all valued education but they had no sense of urgency about pursuing formal education immediately after high school. Their decisions were shaped by particular life circumstances and, for many, a belief that a college education wasn't relevant at that point in their lives. The second finding concerns the teacher-parents. These educators assumed that their children would go on to college, but they didn't pressure them to do so; their primary concern was that their children be happy. Like their children, they also recognize that college is always an option. I have titled this study "Exploring Perspectives on Schooling Held by Teachers' Kids Who Chose Not to Go to College." In these cases, the love of learning has been passed on but not necessarily acquiescence to "formal schooling" or "higher education." The choices made by the young adults in this study grew, often, from their parents' granting them permission to make their own choices. Some of them did choose to forego higher education, others postponed formal schooling and concentrated on raising a family or exploring the world. Knowing about their experiences can help any of us appreciate the special lives they are leading.

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APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

July __, 2006

Dear _____,

This letter is to invite you and your son/daughter to participate in my doctoral study of teachers and their young adult children. I am in the final stages of a doctoral degree in Educational Administration and Human Resource Management at Texas A&M University. The purpose of this study is to understand why some children of teachers, who, having been brought up in an environment where education is highly valued, nevertheless, choose not to pursue a college education. For the sake of the students and their parents, I will examine what impact having a teacher as a parent has had on young adults' construction of formal education and their decision to forgo higher education immediately after high school.

The questions of this study are as follows: (1) What experiences of education do these young adults, who happen to be teachers kids, have? (2) How has their family shaped their understanding of education and their attitudes toward it? (3) How did they choose not to pursue a college degree right out of high school and what meaning do they give to this decision? and (4) What is or was the teacher/parent's response to this decision?

Your participation in this study will be confidential. No participant and his or her responses will be identifiable, except, perhaps in places, my own experience and that of my own children. The reality of teachers' kids who choose not to go to college is more common than you may have expected. My own son took 10 years to earn his first degree, and my daughter chose wife and mother over student as her first adult roles.

I would like to meet with each of you, separately, for about an hour and a half; I will ask you some questions about what you both remember of your son's/daughter's school years and the choice to prolong, postpone, or even forgo college. Please check your schedules and, maybe, talk this over, and I will call in a few days to set up the interviews at your convenience.

I believe teachers and their offspring face some particular challenges in our society, and I hope this study will initiate some important discussion. Thank you in advance for your participation.

Sincerely,

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Interview Schedule: Exploring the Perspectives On Schooling Held By Teachers' Kids Who Chose Not To Go To College

Semi-Structured (Parent)

1. For the tape, would you please state your name and how you found out about this study.
2. How would you describe yourself as a teacher? Why did you choose this profession?
3. How would you describe an ideal teacher? Did you have any role models?
4. Were your children ever in your class? What was that like, for you or your child?
5. Do you think there was anything about your household that was different from somebody's house where mom or dad wasn't a teacher?
6. Can you remember any specific times when being a teacher's kid was a problem for your child? Can you tell me about it?
7. On the flip side, can you remember any specific times when being a teacher's kid was beneficial for your child?
8. Overall, how do you think being a teacher's kid shaped your son's or daughter's attitudes about school and education? Can you remember any specific incidents?
9. Whenever there was a conflict that required a parent/teacher conference, how did you handle that? Can you be specific?

10. In your child's presence, did you generally speak to his or her teachers as a parent or as a fellow teacher?
11. Did you discuss your child's behavior or academic progress with his or her teachers when the child wasn't around? How did you feel about that?
12. Did you ever feel that you had to defend your child? or your parenting decisions?
13. Just a couple of questions about the importance of college: To the best of your knowledge, why didn't your child go to college/stay in college? Are you happy with that decision?
14. A more general question: If you could change one thing about the way education works in this country, what would you change first? Why?

Interview Schedule: Exploring the Perspectives On Schooling Held By Teachers' Kids Who Chose Not To Go To College.

Semi-Structured (Young Adult)

1. For the tape, would you please state your name and how you found out about this study.
2. How would you describe your school experiences?
3. Did you have a favorite type of teacher? Can you remember a favorite teacher or a least favorite teacher?
4. Were you ever in your mom/dad's class? What was that like?
5. When you were in junior high or high school (or even younger), if you can remember, was there anything about your house that was different from somebody's house whose mom or dad wasn't a teacher?
6. Can you remember any specific times when being a teacher's kid was a problem for you? Can you tell me about it?
7. On the flip side, can you remember any specific times when being a teacher's kid was beneficial for you?
8. Overall, how do you think being a teacher's kid shaped your attitudes about school and education?
9. Whenever there was a conflict that required a parent/teacher conference, whose side do you think your parent was on? Can you be specific?
10. In your presence, did your parent speak to your teachers as a parent or as a fellow teacher?
11. Do you think your parent and your teachers talked about you when you weren't around? How did you feel about that?
12. Did you ever have to defend your parent? For example, if students in his or her class were complaining in your presence about the class or the teaching methods, did you say anything?

13. Just a couple of questions about the importance of college: Why aren't you in college right now? How did you explain this decision to your parents?
14. A more general question: If you could change one thing about the way education works in this country, what would you change first? Why?

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORMS

Statement of Informed Consent (Parent)

Voluntary Participation in a Qualitative Study of Perceptions and Attitudes of Teachers' Kids

- I understand that I will participate in this study that has been designed to learn more about how growing up as a teacher's kid influenced my young adult's attitudes about education.
- I understand that Mrs. Sharon M. Ganslen, Associate Professor of English at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, will conduct this study as part of her doctoral dissertation for a Ph.D. in Educational Administration Human Resource Development. She will be conducting one-hour-long interviews with each of eight to ten young adults and their teacher/parents.
- I understand that this interview will be audio taped and transcribed. I will be allowed to read the transcript and clarify any sections of the interview that might have been misunderstood or incorrectly interpreted by Mrs. Ganslen.
- I understand that these interviews will be kept confidential. That means that neither my name nor my young adult's name will appear in any report of this interview. Furthermore, any identifying information (for example, salutatorian of __High School) will be altered or disguised to ensure confidentiality. I will select a pseudonym for the purposes of the transcribed interviews and for the reporting of the results of the study.
- The original tapes, the transcriptions of those tapes, and this signed document will be kept secured by Mrs. Ganslen for at least three years after the end of the study. The tapes will only be available to Mrs. Ganslen, her committee and administrators at Texas A&M, a person or persons who will transcribe the tapes, and the graduate studies department as requested.
- I understand that there will be no payment for my participation in this study.
- I understand that this study poses no expected risks or benefits to participants.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time if I so choose.
- *I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board-Human Subjects in*

Research, Texas A&M University. For research-related problems or questions regarding subjects' rights, I can contact the Institutional Review Board through Ms. Angelina Raines, Director of Research Compliance, Office of the Vice President for Research at (979) 458-4067 or email: araines@vprmail.tamu.edu

I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

Signature_____Age_____Date_____

Investigator's Signature_____Date_____

Statement of Informed Consent (Young Adult)

Voluntary Participation in a Qualitative Study of Perceptions and Attitudes of Teachers' Kids

- I understand that I will participate in this study that has been designed to learn more about how growing up as a teacher's kid influenced my attitudes about education.
- I understand that Mrs. Sharon M. Ganslen, Associate Professor of English at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, will conduct this study as part of her doctoral dissertation for a Ph.D. in Educational Administration Human Resource Development. She will be conducting one-hour-long interviews with each of eight to ten young adults and their teacher/parents.
- I understand that this interview will be audio taped and transcribed. I will be allowed to read the transcript and clarify any sections of the interview that might have been misunderstood or incorrectly interpreted by Mrs. Ganslen.
- I understand that these interviews will be kept confidential. That means that neither my name nor my parents' names will appear in any report of this interview. Furthermore, any identifying information (for example, salutatorian of __High School) will be altered or disguised to ensure confidentiality. I will select a pseudonym for the purposes of the transcribed interviews and for the reporting of the results of the study.
- The original tapes, the transcriptions of those tapes, and this signed document will be kept secured by Mrs. Ganslen for at least three years after the end of the study. The tapes will only be available to Mrs. Ganslen, her committee and administrators at Texas A&M, a person or persons who will transcribe the tapes, and the graduate studies department as requested.
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Signature_____Age_____Date_____

Investigator's Signature_____ Date_____

VITA

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